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ADVENTURE

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25 Cents

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Adventure

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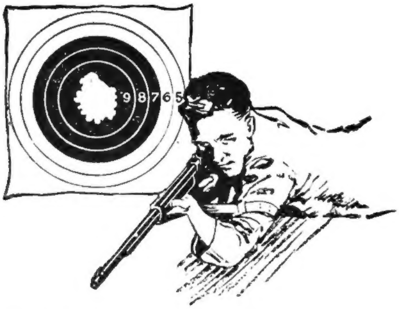
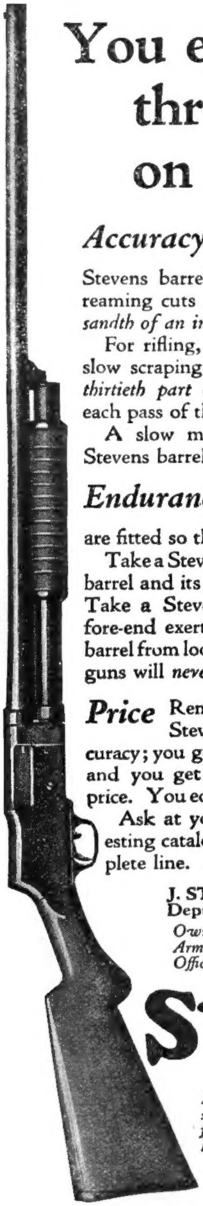
ADVENTURE
Nov. 30th, 1922

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 37
Number 6





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Accuracy Shotgun or rifle—a Stevens firearm is accurate. When a Stevens barrel is bored or drilled, the final reaming cuts away *less than one-half of a thousandth of an inch.*

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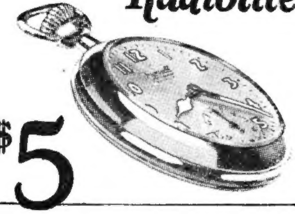

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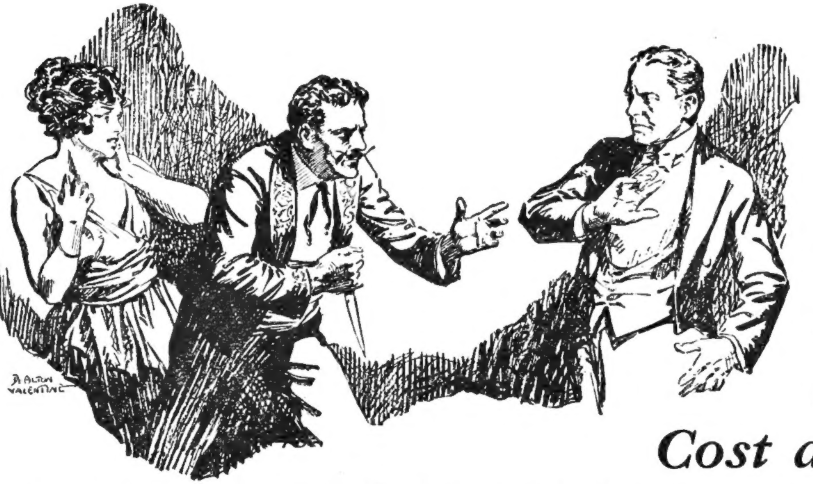

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Jealous beyond all control, the swarthy faced Spaniard stepped menacingly towards O. Henry. Behind him—fearful, frightened now that the havoc was wrought, cowered the girl whose bewitching smile was the cause of it all.

The light flashed evilly on swiftly drawn knife—there was a sudden leap—a deafening crash. It was his life or O. Henry's, and O. Henry's pal never hesitated. But little did he—little did any of them guess how far-reaching, how bitter, the consequences of that wild night would be!

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One Long Novel

Out of the trials and struggles of his own life, O. Henry wrote these stories of the people. He was one of the disinherited—and he knew their problems.

He picked out with deft, yet gentle hand, the little hidden things we all strive to conceal, held them up to the light of day, let the sun shine on them, and then tucked them back again—warmed and heartened, or cleansed and sterilized.

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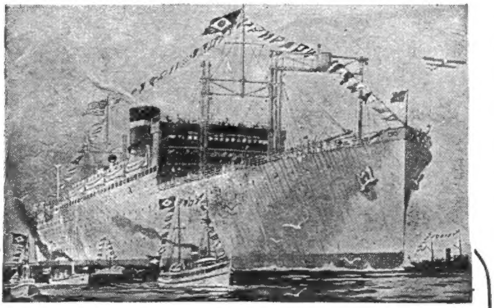

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Almost immediately they set a new record for speed. Rio de Janeiro is only 11 days away. Montevideo and Buenos Aires are but a few days beyond.

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If you will describe the case it will aid us in giving you definite information at once.

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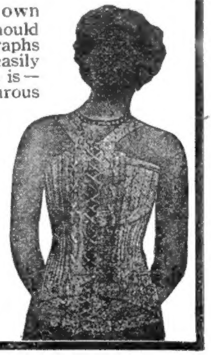

An Easy Way to Remove Dandruff

If you want plenty of thick, beautiful, glossy, silky hair, do by all means get rid of dandruff, for it will starve your hair and ruin it if you don't.

The best way to get rid of dandruff is to dissolve it. To do this, just apply a little Liquid Arvon at night before retiring; use enough to moisten the scalp, and rub it in gently with the finger tips.

By morning, most, if not all, of your dandruff will be gone, and three or four more applications should completely remove every sign and trace of it.

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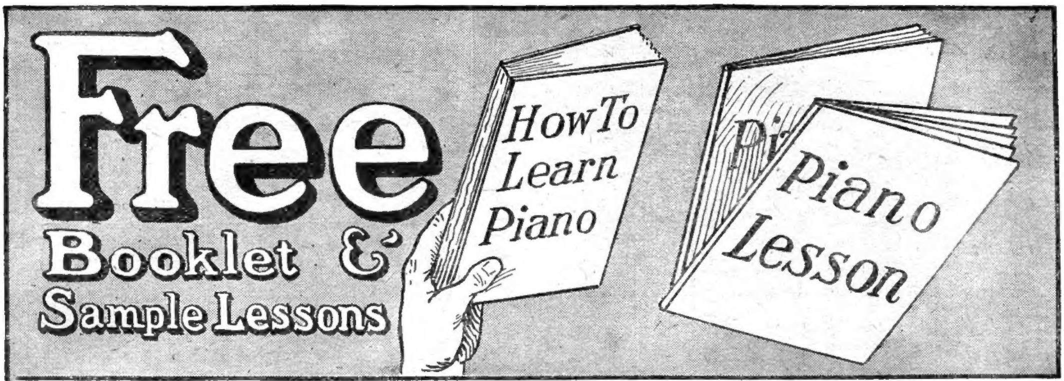

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The Miracle of the Wilderness

IN the heart of a forest—
high up in the purple-topped Adirondacks, where the snows fall early and stay late, a hunter sat down in the great silence to rest.

Leaning on his gun, he fell asleep and dreamed * * *

The forest melted away. In place of the fragrant pines that swept the sky and the giant oaks that closed in about him, quaint cottages dotted the mountain-side. In place of the native fox and deer he hunted, the wilderness was suddenly peopled with many sick—seeking the blessing of health * * *

The huntsman was Edward Livingston Trudeau—"The Beloved Physician." The *doom* of consumption upon him, he was carried to the Adirondacks to make his last days as comfortable as possible.

This was nearly half a century ago. In those days Consumption—now known as Tuberculosis—was looked upon as a visitation of Providence—was considered unpreventable—incurable.

Then came the Miracle—
of fresh air, of sunshine and rest. Soon Dr. Trudeau was hunting and fishing again. The summer past, he returned to the city. A relapse brought him back to try—as a last hope—a winter in the frozen wilderness. Suicidal mania, friends said. Cold air was regarded as fatal to Consumptives.

Dr. Trudeau thrived on it and lived for forty years in the mountains that taught him how to use for himself and others the greatest weapons against Tuberculosis —*fresh air—rest—sunshine.*

Closely following Koch's great discovery that a germ—the tubercle bacillus—causes Tuberculosis, Dr. Trudeau learned to recognize the little "rods of red." Soon physicians everywhere learned to detect the disease in its early stages and thousands of lives were saved. *For it is in its early stages that Tuberculosis can be cured.*

To bring the sick—
the many tuberculous sick—from the cities to the healing wilderness was the dream of the beloved physician. He realized his dream when he built the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium, the first sanitarium for the open-air treatment of Tuberculosis in America—now a wonderful city of houses built *inside-out.*

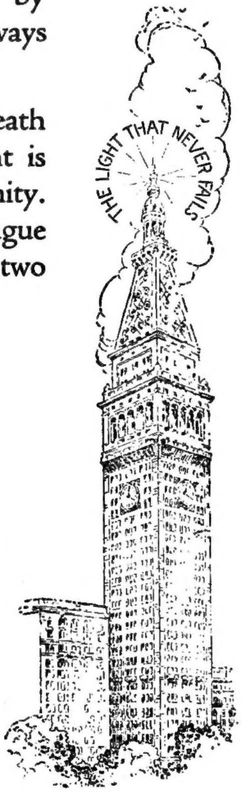
One million sufferers from Tuberculosis—
is the estimated number in the United States *right now.* The disease attacks lungs, skin, brain and bone. Beggar and millionaire are exposed. It attacks all ages—from babyhood to old age. Acute danger periods are infancy and early adult life. The greatest death toll is exacted between 35 and 45—the most productive years of life—just when the family is most dependent on breadwinner or homemaker.

No medicine will cure Tuberculosis—
but it can be cured by fresh air—day and night, winter and summer, rain or shine. By rest, good nourishment, freedom from worry, and supervision by trained physicians. Most of all, by sunshine in the home and *sunshine in the heart.*
Better than cure is prevention through regular examination by physicians, sanitary living and working conditions, and always fresh air and sunshine.

A great crusade is being waged. Since 1904 the Tuberculosis death rate for the United States has been cut in half. But the fight is not the fight of any one country. It is the fight of all Humanity. And when all Humanity *fights* then shall the Great White Plague that has whitened the world with tombstones for more than two thousand years be driven from the Earth.

Before health work was started, there was a death from tuberculosis every eight minutes of every working day of eight hours among Metropolitan policy holders. The disease still causes one-twelfth of all the deaths in this country. If this proportion is allowed to continue, it means that among the people now living in the United States over 9,500,000 are doomed to die from this *preventable* disease. Working with National, State and local organizations —the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has reduced the Tuberculosis death rate, for its policy holders, 49% in ten years. As one-seventh of the population of the United States and Canada is insured in the Metropolitan, the lowering of the death rate vitally affects the entire country. Eight years ago the Company built a sanitarium at Mount McGregor to care for sick members of its staff. In the first seven years there were 896 cases of Tuberculosis discharged. The reports show that 80% of these employees are back at work. For five years the Metropolitan has supported a demonstration of health work in Framingham, Mass., a manufacturing town. The Tuberculosis death rate in that time has been cut in two. The Metropolitan issues a booklet telling how to prevent, how to cure Tuberculosis. A free copy of "A War On Consumption" will be mailed to all who ask for it.

HALEY FISKE, *President*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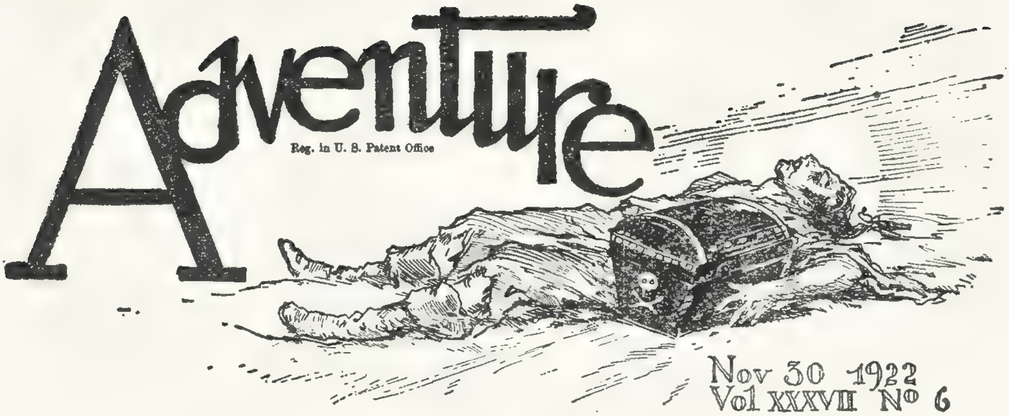
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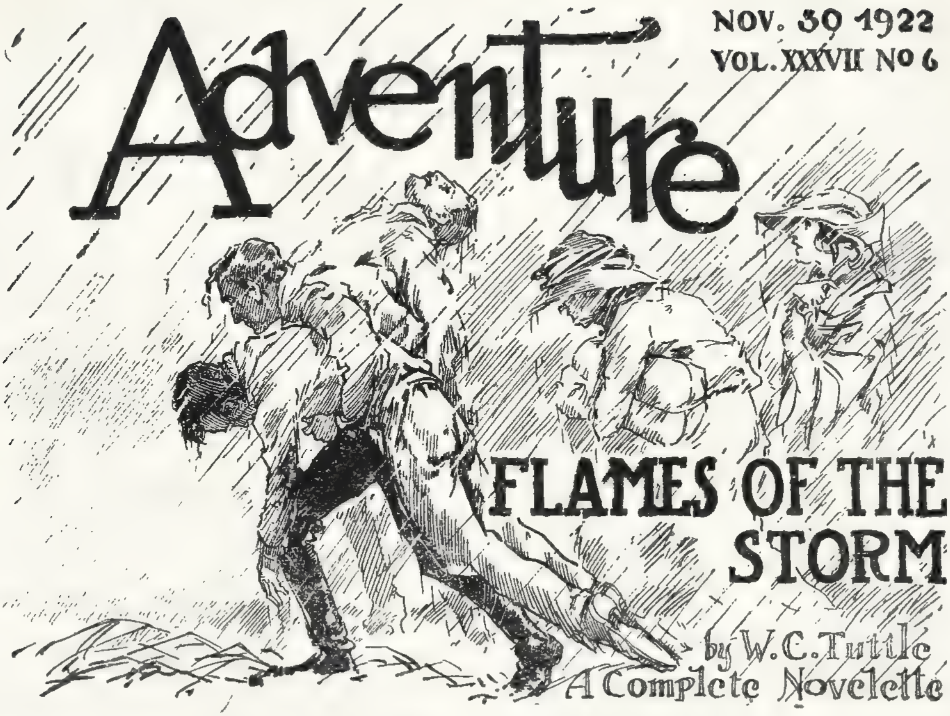
OMMONY knows the tribes of India as does no other white man. But he, and *King*, are powerless when the Moplahs rebel—killing many whites and holding others, *King* and *Ommony* among them, for torture. Then *Mahommed Babar*—"a friend of the Moplahs"—takes a hand. "BENEFIT OF DOUBT," a novel by Talbot Mundy, complete in the next issue.

RUMOR says there are nuggets of gold on a mountain-top that rises sheer and rock-faced above glaciers of grinding ice. And after the gold start seven men, bound together by mutual distrust; each plotting to reach the treasure before the others. "SEVEN FOOLS," by Barry Scobee, a complete novelette in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure* — the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month



Adventure
NOV. 30 1922
VOL. XXXVII No 6

FLAMES OF THE STORM

by W. C. Tuttle

A Complete Novelette

Author of "Ajax for Example," "The Range-Boomer," etc.

IT WAS the year of the big drouth in the valley of Moon River; a season when every blade of grass was worth its weight in gold to the cattlemen, who watched with jealous care over their unstaked portions of the range and guarded closely their almost dry water-holes.

Day after day through the long Summer the merciless sun had baked the grass-roots; browning the land; burning below the surface, until a puff of wind would drift the soil, as a wind drifts dry snow. Even the sage and greasewood turned from purple to brownish-gray.

Along the river, which wound its way through this crescent-shaped valley, the leaves of willow and cottonwood hummed paper-dry in the hot winds, while the river, itself, was shrunken to half its normal Summer stage.

The range cattle were red-eyed, hollow of flank and dust-colored and when they stopped to graze their panting nostrils would send up tiny puffs of smoke-like dust. In all that valley of rolling hills, which sloped upward on both sides to the hazy heights of the Shoshone Mountains, there was no sign of green vegetation.

Riding down the slope of one of these hills, heading toward the river, came a tall, thin cowboy, unshaven and unshorn. The expression of his thin face was serious as he squinted into the hazy distance and spoke softly to his rangy bay horse—

"Bronc, 'f this ain't the best place I ever seen t' commit murder in, then my name ain't 'Skeeter Bill' Sarg."

The horse sniffed suspiciously at the dry grass, but did not crop at it.

"Ain't much juice left in that kinda feed," declared Skeeter Bill, removing his sombrero and wiping his brow with the sleeve of his shirt. For a few minutes he surveyed the country before riding on.

Suddenly he drew rein and sniffed at the breeze. His rather long nose quivered, and he shook his head. Beyond him a cloud of dust floated over the skyline of a ridge, growing more dense. It was impossible to see what was making the dust-cloud, but whatever it was, it came over the ridge

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toward Skeeter Bill and dipped down into the depression beyond.

"Sheep!" snorted Skeeter Bill with the true cowman's disgust of such animals. "We shore poked into one fine country t' poke right out of ag'in, bronc."

Skeeter Bill turned and rode angling along the side of the hill, going through a heavy thicket of greasewood. Suddenly his horse jerked ahead and went to its knees, and Skeeter fell head first into a thick clump of brush. As he fell he heard the whip-like snap of a rifle, and he knew that some one had shot his horse from under him.

He backed out of the tangle and investigated. His bay had crashed into some brush farther down the hill, and Skeeter could see that it was dead. He swore softly and held his gun ready.

The bullet had torn through Skeeter's chaps, along his thigh, missing the flesh by a narrow margin, and had broken the back of the tall bay horse. Skeeter had no idea why he had been shot at, nor how many men might be ready to shoot at him again. It was a ticklish situation, but Skeeter smiled grimly and waited.

Far away he could hear the soft bawling of sheep and the tiny tinkle of a bell. A blue jay screeched harshly from down the cañon. Suddenly the brush crashed as if some one had stumbled into it. Skeeter glanced keenly in that direction, but did not move.

In a few moments the brush crashed again, and Skeeter grinned widely. He knew that some one was tossing rocks into the dry brush to try to get him to investigate. He snuggled a trifle lower and peered low through the tangle of brush above him. Whoever it was, they were moving very cautiously, for no sound of footsteps had come to his ears.

Suddenly his eyes focused on something. It might be part of the brush, and again it might be the legs of a man; a man whose body was completely screened by the heavy foliage. Skeeter considered these leg-like things very closely. Then came a dry cough—more like a wheezing chuckle; as if the man had tried to choke it and merely strangled. It came from above the legs.

"Pardner," said Skeeter distinctly, "I've got yore legs in trouble. 'F yuh don't toss yore gun over toward me, I'm shore goin' t' interest yuh in a pair of crutches."

The legs remained motionless, but from their owner came another wheezing cough. In fact, the man coughed for quite a while, and the visible legs shook weakly at the finish.

"Now, throw over the gun," ordered Skeeter, and a moment later a Winchester rifle crashed into the brush and hung up in view of Skeeter.

"C'm on out, pardner," said Skeeter. "Walk right down past where the rifle hangs, and I'll kinda look yuh over."

The man was coming down through the brush before Skeeter had finished, and broke his way out into the open a moment later.

"Keep yore hands above yore waist," ordered Skeeter meaningly, "while I look yuh over."

The man was possibly not more than thirty years of age, yet looked much older. A stubbly beard covered the lower part of his face, and a pair of weary-looking eyes seemed to consider Skeeter closely.

The man was not evil-looking, in spite of his unkempt appearance. His torn shirt was clean, as were the worn overalls. He coughed softly again, and a flush crept across his thin cheeks.

"Shucks!" muttered Skeeter softly. "Whatcha tryin' t' kill me for, pardner?"

The man shook his head slowly, wearily.

"What's the use of arguing about it? I'm willing to take what's coming to me. I got tired of being shot at, that's all."

"Well," grinned Skeeter, "that's a-plenty, 'f yuh stop t' ask me. C'm here and set down."

The man obeyed wonderingly.

"Yuh got a bad cough," observed Skeeter.

"Go ahead," said the man bitterly. "It's my cough—not yours."

"Aw, ——!" grunted Skeeter. "I beg yore pardon. I'm always sayin' the wrong thing."

He studied the man for several moments, and then:

"Mind tellin' me somethin'? Honest t' goodness, I don't know a danged thing about this here country. I just rode in. When a feller gets his bronc shot out from under him he kinda wants t' know why."

The man's eyes expressed his unbelief. Skeeter laid his six-shooter across his lap and rolled a cigaret while he waited for the man to explain.

"Well," began the man slowly," you've got me dead to rights; so it don't make much difference now. If you're one of the cattlemen I'll likely get lynched for killing the horse."

"Likely," nodded Skeeter dryly. " 'F yuh don't get lynched, you'll figger out that I've told yuh the truth."

Skeeter leaned a little closer and tapped the man on the knee with his finger.

"Pardner, 'f there's anythin' yuh don't want t' tell me the truth about—don't tell anythin'. *Sabe* what I mean?"

"Afraid I'll lie to you?"

"Tellin' yuh not to. I don't care who yuh are, nor what yuh are, pardner. I reckon the killin' of my bronc was a mistake, but that's all past. I don't lie, and I won't stand for no man lyin' t' me."

The man looked curiously at him wondering if this lanky cowboy was joking or not. No, he decided that Skeeter Bill was not joking. A man who would not lie and would not stand for a liar was a novelty in the range-land. The man decided against prevarication.

"My name is Kirk," he stated; "Jim Kirk."

"Mine's Sarg," grinned Skeeter. "Mostly always, folks calls me Skeeter Bill."

"I'm a sheepherder," stated Kirk.

"I'm not!" snapped Skeeter. "I hate the —— things."

Kirk nodded and dug into the hard soil with the heel of his boot.

"I don't love 'em," he admitted softly, shaking his head. "Nobody does, I guess. Still—" Kirk lifted his head and gazed off across the tangle of brush— "still, they have made it possible for me to live out here."

"Oh," softly.

"If it wasn't for the sheep I would probably have to live in a city."

Skeeter cleared his throat softly.

"Well, under them circumstances sheep ain't so danged bad, I reckon. Feller does feel better, livin' out here in the old hills. Mebbe I'd herd sheep, too."

"Yes, you'd do anything to keep living."

"I come danged near shufflin' off a while ago," reminded Skeeter seriously. "That bronc was worth a lot t' me."

The cough came again and occupied Kirk's attention for a period.

"I'm awful sorry about the horse," he panted hoarsely. "I thought you might be gunning for me, and I wanted to beat you to it."

"You shore had the proper idea," grinned Skeeter.

"The idea was all right," admitted Kirk, "and, as I said before, I got tired of being shot at."

"Cows and sheep kinda warrin' round?" queried Skeeter Bill.

Kirk nodded slowly.

"Yes. In a way I don't blame the cowmen. This range has belonged to them ever since the first cow came in over the hill. The sheep will ruin it for anything but sheep, but the law says that sheep and cows have equal rights."

Skeeter Bill snorted. The law had never meant much to him.

"And so the cow-men takes things in their own hands, eh?"

"It seems that way," smiled Kirk.

"You own the sheep?" queried Skeeter.

"Me?"

Kirk shook his head.

"Nope," he denied. "I'm just a hired sheepherder."

"Thasso?"

Skeeter considered Kirk's humped figure for a space of time, and then—

"You ain't no hired killer, Kirk; so why take a chance on killin' or gittin' killed?"

Kirk coughed softly and got to his feet. The sun was yet an hour high, but the cañons were already blocky with purple shadows. From farther down the hill came the bleating of sheep; the everlasting, meaningless *"baa, baa, baa, baa"* from hundreds of throats.

Kirk turned and looked at Skeeter.

"No, I am not a killer. I never shot at a man before."

He pointed down across the brush toward the sheep.

"Do you think I love those things? Sarg, I am not physically fit to do a man's work, and I can't live inside a house. Out here in the hills I have a fighting chance to live, and there is nothing I can get to do, that I can do, except herd sheep."

"Well," drawled Skeeter, "I reckon we better give three cheers for the sheep. But I'm still a li'l hazy as t' why yuh tried t' bump me off, pardner."

"Self-defense. I thought you was one of the gang that left the warning at my camp yesterday. They ordered me to pack up and get out—my wife and me."

"Oh!" grunted Skeeter softly. "You've got a wife with yuh?"

Kirk nodded, and a deep crease appeared between his eyes as he frowned over his own thoughts. Suddenly he shook his head and looked down toward the sheep.

"It's time to take them back, I guess," he remarked. "You might come down to camp with me and have something to eat."

Skeeter nodded.

"I'll take yuh up on that, pardner; but I'll get m' saddle first."

It was only a few moments' work to strip the saddle from the dead horse and to remove the bridle. Skeeter made no more comments about the dead horse. The tall bay had served him well; but Skeeter in his time had ridden many horses, and this was not the first one to perish under him.

CARRYING the heavy saddle, he helped Kirk round up the herd of sheep and head them in the direction of the bed-ground. Through a filmy cloud of dust they followed the bleating herd along the side of the cañon, until of their own accord the sheep headed down on to a flat, where Skeeter could see an old tumble-down shack and part of an old pole-corral.

Smoke was issuing from the crooked old chimney, and as they drew nearer a woman came to the open doorway and looked at them. She was dressed in faded calico and coarse shoes, but Skeeter thought he had never seen a more beautiful face.

After a searching glance at him the woman darted from the doorway and ran to Kirk, as if partly for protection and partly to find out if he was all right. Kirk put an arm around her shoulders and turned to Skeeter.

"Sarg, that is my wife."

"Glad t' meetcha," muttered Skeeter as he placed the saddle on the ground and held out his hand.

The woman glanced at Kirk before she shook hands with Skeeter Bill.

"I killed his horse," said Kirk slowly. "I thought he was one of the cowboys."

"Tha's all right," grinned Skeeter. "Mistakes'll happen in the best of families. I've been mistaken f'r the same thing before."

"Then you're not a cowboy?" queried Mrs. Kirk.

"I dunno." Skeeter Bill shook his head. "I've been a lot of things, ma'am, and I dunno which one took the most. I'm just kinda pesticatin' around, yuh see. I poked into this here country, and unless I'm misreadin' the signs I'm goin' t' poke right out again."

"You'll have to get another horse," reminded Kirk.

"Uh-huh. But that's a cinch in a cow-country. I've got a rope left."

Mrs. Kirk turned to the doorway, as she said—

"Supper is almost ready, Jim, and I know you must be starved—you and Mr. Sarg."

"Yes, ma'am," said Skeeter seriously. "I sure could fold up quite a parcel of food right now, thank yuh kindly."

Skeeter and Kirk washed at the little spring, where a little fence had been built to block out the sheep.

"Does yore wife like this kind of a life?" queried Skeeter.

Kirk shook his head as he squatted on his heels at the side of the spring.

"I don't think so, Sarg, but she is willing to do it for my sake."

Skeeter rubbed his chin thoughtfully for a while and shook his head.

"I dunno much about women, Kirk—the right kind. You ain't much t' look at. She's mighty pretty and sweet; but she's willin' t' live out here, alongside of a bunch of blattin' woollies, just cause it's goin' t' help you."

"That's love, Sarg."

Skeeter Bill squinted closely at Kirk's face and looked back toward the cabin door.

"Love—eh? Heat and dirt and the smell of sheep! Old rickety cabin, canned food and swappin' lead with the cattlemen. No other women; lonesome as ——!"

Skeeter looked down at Kirk and nodded slowly.

"Yeah, I reckon it must be love, pardner," he went on. "I ain't never seen it in that kind of a package before, so I didn't *sabe* it on sight."

"She's my pal—my bunkie," said Kirk slowly. "She's willing to go fifty-fifty with me in everything."

"Thasso? About bein' a pal—I didn't know that a woman could be thataway. Women, t' me, have always been kinda—mebbe I didn't look at 'em right, Kirk. I kinda like that bunkie idea, y'betcha."

"She's the best in the world," said Kirk softly as they neared the house.

"I s'pose," nodded Skeeter. "I s'pose that's right."

The supper was meager in variety as well as in quantity, but it was well cooked.

"I've got to go to town tomorrow," stated Kirk. "We are out of food. I've been putting it off for several days, but it has become an absolute necessity."

"I hate to have you go to town, Jim," said Mrs. Kirk. "Under the circumstances it is hard to tell what might happen."

"Don't you worry, honey."

Kirk leaned across the table and patted her on the shoulder.

"I'll hitch up the old horse to the old wagon in the morning," he continued, "and be back here in two hours with a load of food."

"I've got a better scheme than that," grinned Skeeter. "I'll go after yore grub for yuh."

Kirk shook his head.

"No, I can't let you get into any trouble on our account. They would recognize that horse and wagon, and you can't tell what would happen."

"I'd shore like t' see what would happen," said Skeeter slowly, rolling a cigaret. "I'm willin', 'f the town is, and I ain't got nobody waitin' f'r me t' come back all in one chunk."

"But why should you do this for us?" asked Kirk. "I killed your horse and nearly killed you."

"I dunno why," said Skeeter honestly. " 'F I stopped 't ask m'self, 'Why?' all the time, I'd never do anythin'. Tell me somethin' about this sheep and cattle trouble."

"We are from Chicago," said Kirk. "I was a telegraph operator in a brokerage office until a specialist told me that I must live in the hills or quit living entirely. Then we came West with no place in mind and very little money to start with.

"Somehow we came to Wheeler City and met the man who offered me this job. He was sending in a lot of sheep, which were to be driven in through Table Rock Pass and then broken up into several bands.

"We didn't have a dollar left when this offer came to us, and we accepted it quickly. It was a mighty hard trip for us, because neither of us had ever roughed it before. On this side of the pass the herd was split into four parts and a man led us to this spot.

"Nothing was said to us about trouble with the cattle-men. We were given a rifle and a shotgun and plenty of ammunition. The shotgun is over there in the corner. I have never fired it."

"How long have yuh been in here?" asked Skeeter.

"Two weeks. Three men were killed in the next camp to us on the first day—two sheep-men and one cowboy. The man who brought us in was arrested, although he had nothing to do with the shooting. The judge turned him loose and notified the cattle-men that the sheep-men were not to be molested until it could be fought out in the courts. The cattle-men know that it will take months to get a decision, and in the meantime the sheep are wearing out the range."

"Who owns the sheep?"

Kirk shook his head.

"I don't know. The man who hired me is named McClelland. He did not admit ownership in court, but stated that he was responsible for the sheep."

"You been shot at?"

"Five times," said Kirk. "Anyway I think they shot at me. Perhaps they merely tried to frighten me. At least a dozen of my sheep have been killed at long range."

"Yuh spoke about a warnin'," reminded Skeeter.

Kirk got up and took a piece of paper from a shelf above the table. It was crudely printed with a lead pencil, and read:

GIT OUT AND KEEP GOING.
WE DON'T LIKE SHEEP BUT
WE DO LIKE PURTY WIMIN.
THE LAW AIN'T GOING TO
HELP YOU NONE IN THIS
CASE. YOU BETTER HEED.

There was no name signed to this missive, but its meaning was very plain. Skeeter squinted up at Kirk and handed him the paper.

"You ain't goin' t' heed?"

"They wouldn't dare harm my wife, Sarg."

Skeeter looked at Mrs. Kirk and back to Kirk.

"Pardner, yo're a long, long ways from Chicago. Folks say that men are big-minded, big-hearted in the West, but it takes all kinds of folks t' make up the West, just like it does the East. Some of these cattle-men hate a sheepherder, and 'f that sheepherder had a danged purty wife—Still, they was honest enough t' give yuh a warnin'."

"Would you heed it?" demanded Kirk.

Skeeter rubbed his chin and glanced at Mrs. Kirk, who was watching him intently.

"If you were sick and needed the work, and your wife was willing to stay with you?" added Kirk softly.

"No, by ——!" exploded Skeeter Bill. "Not as long as I had a shell left f'r m' gun, or one arm able t' throw rocks."

"That's how I feel," said Kirk.

"But what protection has your wife got? You have t' leave her here alone, don'tcha?"

"Not all the time," said Mrs. Kirk. "I go out with him quite a lot, and when I am here I have the shotgun, you see."

Skeeter Bill crossed the room and picked up the shotgun. It was a sawed-off Winchester, with a magazine full of buckshot-loaded shells. Skeeter grinned at Mrs. Kirk.

"Didja ever shoot this, ma'am?"

"No, I never have; but I know I could."

"Hm-m-m!"

Skeeter placed the gun back in the corner.

"Perhaps we ought to try it," said Kirk. "I don't know how it shoots."

"Oh, it'll shoot," said Skeeter. "Don'tcha worry about that; but it ain't nothin' t' practise with. When the right time comes, just squeeze the trigger."

"I hope I shall never have to use it," said Mrs. Kirk.

"I hope not," agreed Skeeter; "but 'f yuh ever do have to—don't hesitate, ma'am."

"I do not think I shall."

Mrs. Kirk shook her head.

"Jim and I came out here to stay, you know," she added.

"That's shore the way t' look at it, ma'am."

"Do you intend to locate in this country?" asked Kirk.

"Me?"

Skeeter grinned widely.

"No-o-o," he said, "I can't say I am. I ain't much of a locator, Kirk. I'm jist kinda driftin' along—mostly. I ain't got nobody t' care where I wind up m' li'l ball of yarn. M' pardner got killed in Sunbeam, and since then I've kinda moseyed along."

"We heard of Sunbeam," said Mrs. Kirk. "A new mining-country, isn't it? We thought perhaps we might go there, but there is no railroad and they told us that it was a long desert trip."

"I guess it's a tough place," added Kirk.

"It was," agreed Skeeter thoughtfully. "But there ain't an outlaw left in the town now."

"What became of them?" asked Kirk.

"Well—" Skeeter rubbed his chin slowly—"well, he rode away."

"He rode away? Was there only one?"

"Uh-huh—only one left. The rest cashed in one night. I dunno who's moved in since he left."

"You don't mean to say that you——" Kirk stopped.

Skeeter got slowly to his feet and hitched up his belt.

" 'F you folks don't mind I'll spread m' blankets out by the li'l corral," he said.

"There's room in here," said Mrs. Kirk.

Skeeter shook his head and went out to his saddle, where he untied his blanket-roll and took it up by the little tumble-down corral.

Moonlight silvered the hills, and the moon itself was stereoscopic, hanging like a huge ball in the sky, instead of showing as a flat plane. From the bed-ground came the soft bleating of sheep, while farther back in the hills a coyote barked snappily for a moment and wailed out his dismal howl.

Skeeter wrapped up in his blanket and puffed slowly on a cigaret. He was thinking of Sunbeam and of Mary Leeds, who had come seeking her father. Skeeter had ridden away the night he had been instrumental in cleaning up the outlaws of Sunbeam the night that Mary Leeds' father had been killed.

Skeeter's partner, Judge Tareyton, was Mary's father, but no one knew it until after the judge had died, and Skeeter, broken-hearted over the death of his old partner, had ridden away in the night; ridden away, so that with his going, Sunbeam might be entirely rid of outlaws.

He wondered what had become of Mary Leeds. He knew that the good people would take care of her. He could still hear her voice calling, "Skeeter Bill" to him, as he rode away in the night, and for the first time since that night he wondered why she called to him.

He found himself comparing her to Mrs. Kirk. No, she was not as pretty as Mrs. Kirk, but they were alike in some ways. Finally he snuggled deeper in his blankets and threw away his cigaret. The words of old Judge Tareyton come back to him—

"Keep smilin', son, and don't forget that God put a spark in you—a spark that will flare up and build a big flame for you—if you'll let it."

Skeeter smiled seriously at the memory picture of his old drunken lawyer partner and eased himself to a comfortable sleeping position.

CRESCENT CITY was the county seat of Moon River County, and a typical cattle town. The branch line of the N. W. Railroad came in out of the desert, dropped down through a winding pass, traversed nearly the entire length of the valley and wound its way eastward through the Southern Pass.

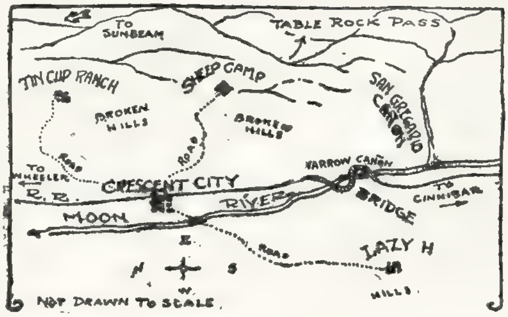
Just now Crescent City was the seat of much agitation, due to the invasion of sheep. Bearded cattle owners and hard-faced cowboys thronged the town, arguing, prophesying, swearing at the law, which gave a sheep the same rights as a cow. The saloons were doing a big business, as were the gambling-halls, and fights were plentiful and easy to start.

Judge Grayson, following his decision in the matter, had remained religiously at home. He was a married man, small of physique, and abhorred violence. Several reckless cowboys had openly sworn to scalp the judge and tie the scalp on a bald-headed sheep.

Ben Freel, the sheriff, was another object of wrath with the cattle-men. None of them considered the duty of a sheriff in this case. Freel was a gun-man, cold as ice, and heartless in matters concerning his sworn duty, and he remained unmoved under the vitriolic criticism hurled at his back.

With the cattle-men it was a case of ousting the sheep or quitting the cattle business. It was true that only a small part of the range was being sheeped out; but if the sheep once gained a foot-hold in the valley of Moon River it would only be a question of a short time until more sheep would come pouring in through Table Rock Pass.

Cleve Hart owned the Lazy H outfit, which was the largest in the Moon River range, with the home ranch within two miles of Crescent City. It was a combined horse and cow outfit and employed many cowboys.



And in all that range land there was no man more bitter toward sheep than Cleve Hart. He was a big man, hard of face, hard-riding, hard-drinking, and a hard fighter. And he hated Ben Freel.

As far as that was concerned, there was no love lost between them, for Freel hated Cleve Hart with all his soul. Hart also hated Judge Grayson—not because he was a judge, but because he was a friend to Ben Freel.

It was Hart's cowboys who killed off the two sheep-herders, losing one of their number at the same time; and it was Hart who declared openly to wipe out all the sheep and sheep-herders, but was stopped by Ben Freel and later restrained by the law.

It was fairly early in the morning when Skeeter Bill drove down the main street of Crescent City; but the hitch-racks were already well filled with saddle-horses, and a large number of cowboys were in evidence.

Skeeter's equipage was fairly noticeable. The horse was an ancient gray, uncurried, patchy of hair and moth-eaten of mane and tail. The wagon was even more ancient than the horse, with wheels which did not track and threatened at any time to wrench loose from the hubs.

The seat springs were broken down on one side, causing Skeeter to sit sidewise with his feet braced against the opposite side of the wagon-box, where he looked entirely out of proportion to the rest of the outfit.

Several cowboys stopped at the edge of the board sidewalk to size him up as he drove up in front of a general merchandise store. There was no doubt in their minds but that this was a sheep-wagon, and the news spread rapidly.

Skeeter appeared oblivious of all this. He rolled and lighted a cigaret before dismounting, which gave the cowboys plenty of time to make closer observations. Several of them went past him and into the store, while others gathered around him and seemed to marvel greatly at his equipage.

"Ba-a-a-a?" queried a skinny cowboy seriously, looking up at Skeeter.

"Yea-a-a-a-ah," said Skeeter just as seriously.

The skinny one colored slightly under his tan, as his lips quivered in another question.

"Maa-a-a-a-a?"

"Naa-a-a-a-a-a-a," bleated Skeeter seriously.

One of the cowboys laughed nervously, but the bleating one's eyes did not waver from Skeeter's face.

"You think you're—smart, don't yuh?" he asked.

"Smart enough t' talk yore language," said Skeeter.

The cowboy's hand jerked nervously along his thigh, but Skeeter did not move. His eyes narrowed slightly, and he nodded slowly.

"Hop to it, pardner. I don't know who yuh are, but I ain't lookin' for no cinch."

The cowboy relaxed slightly and seemed undecided. He had not expected this from a sheep-herder, and he wanted to back out gracefully.

"You jist toddle along," smiled Skeeter. "You don't need t' be afraid t' turn yore back t' me."

"You can't run no blazer on me!" snapped the cowboy, as if trying to bolster up his courage with the sound of his own voice.

"I betcha yo're right," agreed Skeeter. "I ain't never goin' t' try it, pardner. When I talk t' you, I mean every —— word I say."

The cowboy growled something under his breath and turned back across the street toward a saloon. The rest of the cowboys sauntered on, talking softly among themselves and glancing back toward the saloon. Skeeter made a bet with himself that this loud-talking cowboy had disrated himself in their minds. He climbed down, tied his horse and went into the store.

Some of the cowboys were sitting on a counter when Skeeter came in, but paid no attention to him. The storekeeper, who was behind a counter arranging some goods, also paid no attention to Skeeter as he leaned negligently against the counter and whistled unmusically between his teeth.

The cowboys had ceased their conversation, and the place was quiet except for Skeeter's tuneless whistle. Finally the storekeeper turned and looked at Skeeter, who slid a penciled list of the necessary groceries across the counter to him.

The storekeeper glanced down at the sizable list for a moment and then at Skeeter.

"Sheep outfit?" he asked.

Skeeter nodded, and the man shoved the list back to Skeeter.

"I'm out of all them articles," he stated and turned back to his work.

Skeeter Bill turned slowly and looked around. One of the largest articles on the list was flour, and on a central counter were at least ten sacks. His eyes turned to shelving behind the storekeeper, where there were canned goods, baking-powder, salt. On the counter beside him were several strips of bacon.

Skeeter Bill considered his list carefully, checking off the goods in sight. He knew that the store had declared an embargo on the sheep-men. It was a mean move and might be very effective, as Crescent City was the nearest supply point by at least thirty miles.

The storekeeper turned his head and favored Skeeter Bill with an ugly look.

"I told you once that I'm all out of them goods," he repeated heatedly.

"I heard yuh," grinned Skeeter, "but I thought I'd kinda hang around until yuh got a new supply."

"Then you'll have a —— long time, feller."

"Oh!" grunted Skeeter. "I've got a mind not t' trade with you a-tall. You look somethin' like a storekeeper I knowed in Oklahoma, but I know you ain't the same one, 'cause he got hung f'r givin' short weight to a widder woman. I'll leave the list with yuh, and I'm goin' t' weigh everythin' before I pay yuh for it."

Skeeter turned on his heel and walked out of the door, while the irate storekeeper sprawled across the counter and tried to swear. The cowboys, who had suggested the embargo, went out slowly, solemnly, choking back their unholy glee at the discomfiture of the storekeeper.

SKEETER soon found that emissaries of the cattle-men had preceded him to every store, and in each place he was given to understand that they were out of all staple and fancy groceries. It was the first time that the cattle interests had thought of such a move, and they were jubilant over its success.

No one made any move to interfere with Skeeter Bill. He did not look like a sheepherder. His faded clothes, high-crowned hat and high-heeled boots proclaimed the cow-puncher. The hang of his well-filled cartridge belt and the angle of his heavy, black-handled Colt were readable signs to the cattle-men.

Skeeter loafed along the street, cogitating deeply over just what to do, when a man rode into town and headed for the sheriff's office, in front of which Skeeter was standing.

The man was Ben Freel, the sheriff. One side of his head was a welter of gore. Several cowboys crowded around him, as he dismounted heavily and leaned wearily against the short hitch-rack.

"Wha'sa matter, Ben?" asked a cowboy. "Didja get bushwhacked?"

Freel nodded.

"Shepherd?" queried another cowboy anxiously.

"How in —— do I know?" snapped Freel. "Somebody bushed me, that's a cinch, and I want to say right now that this bush warfare has got to quit."

Freel went into his office, slamming the door behind him. Skeeter decided that Freel was decidedly more mad than injured. The cowboys showed little sympathy for Freel, but it gave them another talking point. Skeeter walked away from the group and went back toward the first store he had entered.

The storekeeper was alone this time. He seemed greatly peeved at the sight of Skeeter Bill.

"Yore stock of goods arrived yet?" queried Skeeter.

"No, by ——!" yelped the grocer. "You git out of here and stay out!"

He snatched Skeeter's list off the counter and shoved it under Skeeter's nose.

"You take your —— list and vamoose!"

Skeeter took the list and looked it over carefully, after which he picked up a sack of flour in his left hand and again looked at his list.

"Leggo that flour!" howled the storekeeper. "Leggo——"

He grabbed the flour in one hand and took a long swing at Skeeter's chin with the other. The fist described an arc, met no resistance and swung its owner half-around, causing him to let loose of the sack.

Skeeter swung up the sack in both hands and brought it down upon the unprotected head of the staggering storekeeper, knocking him to the floor in a smother of flour from the burst sack.

On the floor near him was a great coil of new, half-inch Manila rope. As the storekeeper struggled to his feet Skeeter back-heeled him neatly and broke all records for hog-tying a human being.

The storekeeper let out a yelp for assistance, but Skeeter shook the rest of the flour out of the sack and used the sack to gag his victim. Then Skeeter proceeded to stack up his list of necessities, working swiftly.

Estimating at a top figure, he placed the money on the counter and began carrying his purchases out to the wagon. Luckily no one was paying any attention to him, as most of the inquisitive ones were down at the sheriff's office trying to find out just what had happened to him.

The ancient gray looked upon Skeeter with disapproving eyes as it noted the amount of weight which was to be drawn back to the sheep-camp; but Skeeter's one big idea was to get out of Crescent City as fast as possible.

He climbed to the rickety seat, almost upset the wagon on a short turn, and rattled out of town. Several cowboys had come out of the saloon across the street and watched him drive away.

Skeeter caught a glimpse of one of these cowboys waving his arms wildly as he started across toward the store, and Skeeter knew that the cowboy had seen the half-loaded wagon and was going to find out what had happened to the storekeeper.

It was nearly three miles to the sheep-camp—three miles of crooked, rutty road; and it was like riding a bucking broncho to stay on that wagon-seat. Skeeter lashed the old gray into a gallop—or rather what resembled a gallop—and urged it to further speed with whip and voice.

As they topped the crest of a hill Skeeter looked back, but the pursuit had not started yet; so he yelled threateningly at the old gray, and they lurched off down the grade in a cloud of alkali dust.

Skeeter knew that the cowboys would probably follow him and try to recover the supplies, but he also knew that they would not get them without a fight. He had promised the Kirks that he would bring back the supplies, and Skeeter Bill meant to keep his word.

The old gray looked like an advertisement for a popular soap-suds powder when they skidded, slewed and lurched down on to the sheep-ranch flat and stopped at the door of the little cabin. Skeeter yelped loudly, but no one answered his hail; so he fell off the rickety seat and began gathering up packages from the rear of the wagon, while the ancient gray spread its legs wide apart and heaved like a bellows.

"Maud S," said Skeeter, "you ain't —— for speed, but yuh shore can lather a-plenty. 'F I had a razor I'd give yuh a shave."

He started for the half-open door with his arms full of plunder, when he happened to look down at the ground near the low step, where the pump shotgun was leaning against the house, with its muzzle in the dirt.

Skeeter kicked the door open, placed the food inside and came back to the gun. He looked it over and pumped out an empty shell. The gun had been fired recently, and a grin overspread Skeeter's face as he visualized Mrs. Kirk shooting at a target to try the gun.

"Kicked her so danged hard that she dropped it and busted off across country for fear it might go off ag'in," mused Skeeter; but as his eyes searched for a possible target he stared at the fringe of the old dry-wash, about fifty feet away.

Taking a deep breath, he walked straight out there and looked down at the body of a man. Skeeter did not know him. He was a big man with a deeply lined face, and his hair was slightly gray. He wore a faded blue shirt, nondescript vest, overalls and bat-winged chaps. One of his arms was doubled under him, and that hand evidently held a six-shooter, the barrel of which protruded out past his hip.

Skeeter turned him over and felt of his heart. The man had evidently received the whole charge of buck-shot between his waist and shoulders, and there was no question but that he was dead.

Skeeter squatted down beside the dead man with the shotgun across his lap. There was no question in his mind but that either Kirk or his wife had fired the fatal shot. Which one, it did not matter. They had only been protecting their rights; but would the law look at it in the right way?

Skeeter had become so engrossed in the problem that he forgot his wild ride from town. He knew that he must dispose of this body at once—wipe out all evidence of this tragedy—anything to get it away from the sheep-camp and out of the light of day.

The brushy bottom of the old dry-wash suggested the handiest spot, and without a moment's delay he swung the body around, climbed partly down the bank and hoisted the body to his shoulder. The loose dirt gave way with him, and he almost fell to his knees at the bottom, but managed to right himself. As he plunged ahead into the brush he seemed to be surrounded by horsemen, some of them almost crashing into him.

He swung the body aside into a bush and reached for his gun, but looked up into the muzzles of four guns, and one of them was in the hand of Ben Freel, the sheriff. Two other cowboys came riding through the brush and stopped near them.

Freel spurred his horse ahead and looked down at the dead man.

"By ——!" he grunted. "Cleve Hart!"

Skeeter did not look up. The name meant nothing to him; he was thinking rapidly. He still had his gun. It was true that at least three six-shooters were leveled at him, but he might last long enough to make them sorry they had followed him.

"Take his gun, Slim," ordered the sheriff, and one of the cowboys swung down and deftly yanked Skeeter's gun from its holster.

Skeeter glanced up at Freel and smiled wearily.

"I'm glad your man took m' gun, sheriff. I feel better now."

"Yeah?"

Freel took the gun from the cowboy and dropped it into his pocket as he turned to Skeeter.

"Mind tellin' us about it?"

Skeeter glanced at the dead man and around at the circle of cowboys.

"No-o-o, I don't reckon I will, sheriff."

"What did yuh shoot him for?"

This from one of the cowboys, who was riding a Lazy H horse.

Skeeter shut his lips tight and shook his head. Freel dismounted and examined the body carefully.

"Buckshot," he said finally. "Riddled him."

"The gun's up there on the bank," said Skeeter, jerking his head in that direction. "The empty shell is over in front of the shack."

"You're a —— of a cool customer," declared the one called Slim.

"Ancestors was Eskimos," said Skeeter seriously.

"If yuh ask me, I'd say he's as crazy as a loon," said another cowboy, who wore long hair and a chin-strap. "They say that's what happens to sheep-herders."

Freel sent two of the cowboys to get the shotgun and empty cartridge shell, to be used as evidence, while he dismounted and slipped a pair of handcuffs on Skeeter Bill and ordered him to mount one of the horses.

"Mind doin' me a li'l favor, sheriff?" asked Skeeter.

"Mebbe not," growled Freel. "Whatcha want?"

"Ask the boys t' leave that bunch of grub alone. Yuh came out here t' take it away from me, but yuh landed bigger game than tryin' t' starve a shepherd."

"No, by ——!" interrupted the one called Slim. "We aim to bust up this —— sheep business, and starvation is better than bullets."

"There's a woman t' starve," Skeeter Bill reminded him.

Slim hesitated and shrugged his shoulders.

"We'll let the grub alone," nodded Freel. "A few days more or less won't ruin the cow-business, I reckon."

Slim favored Freel with a black look, but at this moment the two cowboys came back with the evidence and gave it to Freel.

"My bronc will pack double, Andy," said Freel to one of the cow-punchers. "You ride behind me, and the prisoner will ride your horse."

"Awright."

Andy did not relish this arrangement, but swung up behind the sheriff, and the cavalcade moved back toward town.

Skeeter glanced back toward the shack, where the ancient gray was still standing wearily before the open door, waiting for some one to unhitch him.

CRESCENT CITY was deeply stirred over the killing of Cleve Hart, who, although not exactly popular, was the biggest cattle owner in the valley. The guilt of Skeeter Bill was unquestioned, as he had been caught with the goods. Unluckily for him the sheriff and posse had lingered a few minutes before giving chase to recover the sheep-herder's grub-stake, and this lapse of time had been sufficient for Skeeter to have killed Cleve Hart.

There was much talk of a lynching, headed by the boys from the Lazy H, but wiser counsel had pointed out the fact that the law would make no mistake in this case, and that Skeeter Bill would pay the supreme penalty.

Skeeter Bill himself seemed indifferent. He refused to talk to the lawyer who had been appointed by the court to defend him, and the lawyer did not argue the point to any great extent. He was the son of a cattleman, and to save the life of a sheep-herder would not react to his credit. Therefore he became counsel with the defense, rather than for it.

It was a week from the time of Skeeter Bill's arrest until the day of his trial, and he had had plenty of time to think over his predicament. Of Kirk and his wife he had seen nothing; which was not strange, because Crescent City was no place for sheep-herders to visit. Only a voluntary confession from them would exonerate him, for it would do Skeeter no good to try to pass the guilt to them—even if he had been so inclined.

Crescent City was crowded on the opening day of the trial, and the little courtroom was filled to suffocation. Never was a trial jury selected with less argument. The counsel with the defense used no challenges, and the prosecuting attorney passed each juror with few questions. Skeeter Bill smiled softly, as he studied the faces of the twelve men. They were all cattlemen.

"I've got about as much chance as a snowball in ——," he told his lawyer in an undertone.

"It's your own fault," the lawyer reminded him sourly. "You wouldn't talk to me about the case."

"Well, everybody else did, I reckon—and they likely told the truth, as far as they could see."

The evidence was overwhelming. Every cowboy who had been with the sheriff on the day of the arrest took the stand and swore to the same story. There was no cause for any delay in presenting the case to the jury, and the prosecutor, supreme in his knowledge that the prisoner was already convicted, opened his vials of righteous wrath and hinted that Skeeter Bill was guilty of every known crime against humanity.

At the height of his vituperative oratory he suddenly crashed to earth when Skeeter Bill, handcuffed, threw the sheriff aside, grasped the prosecutor with both hands, kicked his feet from under him, and hurled him over the railing into the front row of sight-seeing humanity.

In an instant the courtroom was in an uproar, but Skeeter Bill backed up against the judge's desk and made no further move. The prosecutor crawled back to his seat, torn of raiment and dazed of mind.

"All I ask for is a square deal," stated Skeeter to the court. "That lawyer is a —— liar, tha'sall."

"You'll get a square deal," declared the judge nervously, rapping on his desk. "Sit down, Sarg."

"Where and when do I get this here square deal?" queried Skeeter Bill. "With all the witnesses ag'in' me and a jury of cow-punchers, where do I get off? You've got me cinched f'r murder, judge—why let that ganglin', horse-faced lawyer add t' my crimes?"

The prosecutor got quickly to his feet and wailed an objection, but the judge ordered him to sit down.

"I do not think there is any use of reviling the prisoner," declared the judge. "The evidence is plain enough, I think."

Skeeter Bill got to his feet and faced the court.

"Just a moment, judge. I reckon yuh got me cinched f'r this killin', but I'd like t' ask a question before that jury decides t' hang me, 'f I can."

"I think you have that right, Sarg," admitted the judge.

Skeeter turned to Freel.

"Mind swearin' t' tell the truth, sheriff?"

Freel walked to the witness chair, while his deputy edged in beside Skeeter Bill.

"Sheriff," said Skeeter Bill slowly, "Cleve Hart had a six-gun in his hand when he died. Did you see that gun?"

"Yes."

"Had it been fired?"

"Once," nodded Freel. "There was one empty shell."

"Tha's all," said Skeeter, and turned to the judge. "Yuh can only hang a man f'r murder, judge; and it ain't exactly murder when the other feller shoots too. Ain't it sort of a question as t' who shot first?"

The prosecutor jumped to his feet and objected at the top of his voice, but the judge turned a deaf ear to him as he instructed the jury.

Skeeter Bill expected little from those twelve hard-faced cattle-men as they filed out into the jury room to decide his fate. The judge had explained the difference between first and second degree murder, and had dwelt upon the possibility of self-defense, but Skeeter felt that the jury were in no mood to argue among themselves.

Fifteen minutes later they returned their verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree. For several moments there was intense silence in the courtroom; broken only by the voice of Judge Grayson—

"William Sarg, stand up."

Skeeter got to his feet and faced the judge, who said:

"You have been found guilty of murder in the first degree. Is there any reason why the sentence of the court should not be passed upon you?"

Skeeter shook his head slowly. The jury had taken no cognizance of the fact that Cleve Hart might have shot first—had given him no benefit of any doubt.

"Go ahead, judge," said Skeeter softly. "There ain't nothin' else yuh can do."

Judge Grayson's eyes searched the courtroom, passed over the stony-faced jury and came back to Skeeter Bill.

"William Sarg, I sentence you to life imprisonment at Red Lodge."

Life imprisonment! Skeeter took a deep breath. He had expected a death sentence. The courtroom buzzed with excitement, and one of the jurymen swore openly. Skeeter felt a pressure on his arm and turned to find Freel looking him square in the eyes and saying—

"Sarg, I'm —— glad."

Skeeter smiled at the irony of it all. Congratulating him on a life sentence! The judge was leaving the bench, and the jury had been discharged. The room still buzzed with conversation, and Skeeter heard one man say:

"—— such a judge! He ain't got guts enough to hang a sheep-herder!"

Skeeter turned and looked at this man. He was a small, thin-faced, almost chinless person with close-set eyes and a broken nose. His eyes dropped under Skeeter's stare, and he turned away, walking with arms bent stiffly at the elbow and with a peculiar swaying motion.

"That's Kales," said Freel as Skeeter turned back. "He's a gun-man. I think he is working for some of the cattle outfits."

Skeeter nodded.

"I've heard of him. Feller told me that Kales never missed his man. He will—some day. They all do."

Freel took Skeeter back to his cell and locked him in.

"When do we make the trip?" asked Skeeter.

"I dunno."

Freel shook his head.

"Soon, I reckon," he added.

Freel went up the street and mingled with the crowds. There was no question that the sentence was unpopular among the cattle-men. Their tempers were worn to a frazzle over the drouth, the continuous heat and the sheep trouble, and a hanging might act as a safety valve. Freel caught the gist of a remark between Kales and one of the Lazy H cowboys, which hinted at a lynching.

There were open remarks about Judge Grayson being chicken-hearted, and some of them seemed even to blame Freel for what they considered a miscarriage of justice.

Alone in his small cell, Skeeter Bill sat down and contemplated his future. He was thirty-five years of age, and in all probabilities he would live thirty-five years longer. His mind traveled back over the years he could remember as he tried to visualize the long years to come—years of being only a number, a caged atom.

"I laid down on the job," he told himself bitterly as he thought of his capture. "Why didn't I take a chance of shootin' m'self loose from that gang? All they could 'a' done was t' kill me. Or why in —— didn't I let that dead man alone?"

He shook his head sadly.

"I swore at that horse 'cause it didn't have no speed; and t' think of how it could 'a' saved me by dyin' half-way out there."

But again Skeeter Bill shook his head. If it hadn't been for him, Kirk or his wife would now be sharing this cell.

"Pals," said Skeeter. "Bunkies—and him fightin' f'r life. Livin' and lovin' thataway. ——! They deserve a chance, I reckon. But—" Skeeter lifted his head and spoke to the barred door—"I didn't take their crime jist t' save them. Nope, I wasn't doin' that—I was jist tryin' t' give 'em a chance t' git away, tha's all. I ain't no —— hero; I'm jist unlucky, I am."

Freel came back into his office, and in a few minutes he came back to the cell door.

"I dunno when we'll make the trip, Sarg. There's lots of wild talkin' bein' done, and we may have to sneak out of Crescent City."

Skeeter grinned seriously.

"Seems kinda funny f'r me t' have t' sneak to the penitentiary, Freel."

Freel laughed shortly.

"Is kinda queer. I don't reckon they'll try to take yuh out of here."

"First time I ever was in a jail that I didn't want t' leave," grinned Skeeter Bill.

Freel turned and walked back to his office. He seemed nervous over the outcome of it all; but Skeeter Bill, if he was perturbed in the least, did not show it. He wondered whether any of his acquaintances outside the valley had heard of his arrest. News did not travel fast in that country.

His thoughts turned back to Mary Leeds and the town of Sunbeam. Would she ever know? Somehow he hoped she would never find out. Mary Leeds was nothing to him, he told himself. She knew him as an outlaw. Sunbeam knew him as a gun-fighting law-breaker—even if he had been instrumental in cleaning up the place. No, she would not be at all interested in his future.

Skeeter shook his head sadly over it all. He was making a fitting finish, but there was little glory in it.

"I wonder where m' spark is?" he mused. "I've got a fine chance t' build it into a flame where I'm goin'. Yet I wonder why Mary Leeds called, 'Skeeter Bill!' when I rode away. Anyway I won't need t' worry about gittin' a hair-cut no more, and a number ain't no worse than a name."

SUNBEAM had been good to Mary Leeds. On the night that her father had been killed, several wealthy bad-men had died intestate, and Sunbeam settled their estates without recourse to law.

But the life of the border mining-town palled upon her. She did not fit in somehow. The estimable Mrs. Porter had taken her into their home and had grown rather refined in her language, due to the instructive criticism of Mary Leeds.

"My ——!" exclaimed Mrs. Porter. "Ever since Jim Porter flirted openly with a stick of dynamite I've had t' do everythin' 'cept chaw tobacco; but now I reckon I've got t' curry m' finger-nails, wear stockin's and say, 'Yessir' t' every hard-headed son-of-a-rooster that comes after his laundry."

"But," explained Mary, "you are a woman."

"Tha's so," agreed Mrs. Porter dubiously. "I s'pose I am. I've got them charact'-ristics. I kinda wish you'd stay here in Sunbeam. Me 'n' you git along sweet and pretty, but after you're gone I'll be the only ree-fined female in this whole —— town. Mebbe I'll forgit everythin' you learned me, and start in swearin' like ——."

"I hope not," sighed Mary. "You have been lovely to me, Mrs. Porter. I don't know what I would have done without you and——"

Mrs. Porter lifted her homely face and looked closely at Mary, who was staring out of the half-open window. The rumble of a series of blasts shook the ground, and from over on the street came the bumping and rattling of a heavy freight wagon.

Mary Leeds was not beautiful, though not far from it. Her face was appealing in its delicate lines, and a pair of wistful, blue eyes looked out into the world from below a tangle of soft brown hair.

Mary turned and saw Mrs. Porter looking at her.

"You didn't quite finish your statement, Mary," said Mrs. Porter softly.

Mary's eyes switched back to the window, but she did not reply.

"You kinda meant t' say a man's name, didn't you?"

"A man?"

Mary did not turn her head.

"Yeah, a man; Skeeter Bill Sarg."

Mary turned and looked straight at Mrs. Porter.

"Skeeter Bill? Why should I mention him?"

Mrs. Porter turned back to her washtub and thoughtfully lifted a dripping garment.

"I dunno why."

She shook her head.

" 'Course he didn't do nothin' for you," she added.

Mary continued the stare out of the window.

"Funny sort of a feller, was Skeeter Bill," mused Mrs. Porter. "I 'member that he killed Jeff Billings 'cause Jeff lied to him. And Jeff had some laundry with me which wasn't paid for, and Skeeter paid for it. I offered it to him, but he wouldn't take it.

" 'Member how he saved you and the preacher at the Poplar Springs, after Tug Leeds and his gang had shot up the outfit to steal the horses? He brought yuh both back here, and backed the preacher t' clean up Sunbeam.

"And Tug Leeds lied to you and the preacher about Skeeter, and made yuh think he was a awful bum. 'Member that, do you?

"And then mebbe yuh 'member how Tug Leeds framed it to have the preacher hold church in his danged honkatonk t' disgust both of yuh, and how Skeeter Bill raised —— with the whole gang and saved yuh from bein' stole by Leeds and his gang?

"'Member that some of that lousy outfit shot old Judge Tareyton, through the winder, and the old judge, with his dyin' muscles, pulled the trigger that sent Tug Leeds t' ——?

"And Judge Tareyton was your own pa, and Tug Leeds was the man who had sent him to the penitentiary and stole his name. 'Member all that, don't yuh? Skeeter Bill was the man who engineered all that."

Mary turned slowly and nodded dumbly.

"I know. I owe him everything, Mrs. Porter. He—he had been awful good to my old daddy, they say. He saved my life, I think. But he said he was a horse-thief and——"

"Y'betcha he did! Honest? Whooee, that ganglin' outlaw sure was honest. If he'd 'a' got killed in that entertainment they'd put up a monyment to him; but as it is I suppose some of these snake-hunters would kill him on sight.

"Human nature is kinda like that, Mary. Folks that pack a sawed-off shotgun for yuh when you're alive, will chip in t' give yuh a fancy tombstone and shed tears over yuh when you're dead.

"Folks cuss me for wearin' out their shirts on a old wash-board; but I'll betcha if I died they'd all chip in and put mè up a tombstone, real finicky, with a marble angel humped over a wash-tub, lookin' at a marble shirt, and on it they'd engrave, 'Not worn out, but —— near it.'"

Mary Leeds laughed at Mrs. Porter's serious expression and dejected position over the wash-board as she held the dripping shirt in both hands and gazed at the ceiling.

"'F I go to heaven," continued Mrs. Porter, "and they tell me that angels wear shirts, I'm sure goin' to tell 'em that I know of a lot of preachers that have got the wrong dope on things down here."

Mrs. Porter slapped the shirt back into the sudsy water and sank down in a broken-backed chair.

"Aw, I'm sick of it all, so I am. Scrub, scrub, scrub, all the time 'cept when I'm ridin' sign on a —— flat-iron! Miners bring in their flannel shirts so danged dirty that yuh can't wash 'em—yuh have t' cultivate 'em. Their socks has been worn so long that I have t' picket 'em out, 'stead of hangin' 'em on the line.

"Feller brought me six suits of underclothes last week, and I let 'em fall off the table. Know what they done? Three suits broke all t' ——, and the other three was so badly cracked that he made me pay for 'em. I tell yuh I'm sick of it. How in —— can I git refined under them conditions, I ask yuh?"

Mrs. Porter gathered up her apron in both hands and buried her face within its damp folds while her shoulders shook with supressed emotion. Mary went to her quickly and threw both arms around her shoulder.

"Oh, I'm so sorry! It is too hard. Do you really have to stay here, Mrs. Porter? Couldn't you live just as well in some other town?"

"I s'pose so."

Mrs. Porter's voice was muffled.

"Goodness knows there ain't many towns where men don't git their shirts dirty," she added.

"I didn't mean that," explained Mary softly. "Perhaps you could get into something else. Suppose you go back East with me?"

Mrs. Porter lifted her head quickly and stared wide-eyed at Mary.

"Go East with you?"

"Where there are lots of folks and——"

"Lots of shirts?" supplied Mrs. Porter. "Lord bless you, child, I ain't got but eighty dollars t' my name."

"I have," said Mary; "I have enough for us both."

Mrs. Porter shifted her eyes and looked around the room. There was nothing attractive about the rough shack interior. Outside, a mule-skinner spoke in the only language known to mules, and a heavy wagon lurched past through the dust. Mrs. Porter shoved the hair back from her face and got slowly to her feet.

She lifted up the sodden shirt and slapped it against the wash-board.

"This here shirt belongs t' Doc Sykes, the coroner. Kinda prophetic-like, so it is, 'cause I've told him that he was the last person I ever expected t' do business with. Gimme room t' wring, young woman, 'cause I'm sure goin' t' wind up m' career in a big splash. You sure got somethin' wished on to you when you issued a invite t' me to go where men change their shirts once per week. Whooee!"

Mary Leeds laughed joyously and gave Mrs. Porter plenty of room for her last appearance as a laundress in a mining-camp.

WHILE Mary Leeds and Mrs. Porter prepared to leave Sunbeam, and while Skeeter Bill Sarg smoked innumerable cigarets and waited for the sheriff to take him to the penitentiary at Red Lodge, a disgruntled crew of cowboys and paid gunmen loafed around the Lazy H ranch.

It had developed that Cleve Hart was not sole owner of the Lazy H, and that the other owners, who were Eastern capitalists, were disgruntled over their investment, and ordered an immediate sale of the property and the discharge of all employees forthwith.

Nick Kales had sold his services to Cleve Hart without any agreement from the other owners; with the result that he was forced to look forward to about two weeks' pay at the rate of forty dollars a month, instead of the generous bonus due him as a professional gunman.

"Dutch" Van Cleve, a protegé of Nick Kales, was also a bit disgruntled over the outcome. The rest of the remaining cowpunchers, "Red" Bowen, "Swede" Sorenson, "Roper" Bates and "Boots" Orson, faced a lean year, as none of them saved more than tobacco money out of their monthly salary.

The killing of Cleve Hart and the arrest and conviction of Skeeter Bill had quieted things to some extent, but it was only an armed truce. Cowboys rode dead-lines and managed to keep the sheep within a well-defined area; but the cattle-men knew that an adverse court decision would wipe out dead-lines, and with it the cattle business.

Swede Sorenson had just ridden in from Crescent City, bringing the mail; and among it was a letter for Nick Kales, postmarked from the town of Wheeler.

Kales looked it over gloomily and put it unopened into his pocket. He exchanged a word or two with Dutch Van Cleve aside, and a little later they both approached Roper Bates, a saturnine, narrow-between-the-eyes sort of a puncher.

"Can yuh read?" queried Kales.

"Well," grinned Roper, "I ain't no —— professional reader, as yuh might say; but I *sabe* some of the alphabet."

"Yuh know how to keep your mouth shut, don't yuh?"

"Now," said Roper seriously, "you're guessin' me dead center. Shoot the piece, Kales."

Kales took out the letter and handed it to Roper, who looked at it curiously.

"It ain't never been opened," he remarked.

"Me 'n' Dutch can't read," explained Kales. "We're askin' yuh to decipher it for us; *sabe?*"

Roper took out the letter and laboriously spelled out the pencil-written message.

"It says," began Roper:

> "Dear Nick: All set for a big one on Thursday the eighteenth. Make it look good. Number 16. Hits there about nine o'clock. Burn this up right away.
>
> Very truly yours,
>
> Wheat."

Roper finished and looked up at Kales, who was staring intently at him.

"What'sa idea?" queried Roper seriously.

Kales watched Roper's face closely for several seconds and then took the letter from him. He touched a lighted match to one corner of the letter and envelop and watched them burn to a flimsy cinder.

"You know somethin' now," said Kales meaningly, "and there ain't no use tellin' yuh to keep your mouth shut."

"Aw, ——!" grunted Roper. "You make me tired. If the deal's any good I want in on it."

Kales and Dutch exchanged glances. Dutch was long of face, crooked of nose and with a pair of round eyes which seemed to film over, instead of blinking.

"Whatcha think, Dutch?" queried Kales.

"Aw'right," nodded Dutch. "I don't care."

"What about the rest—Red, Swede, Boots?" asked Kales. "This job is big enough for all."

"All square," declared Roper. "All square, and all broke. Put it up to 'em, Kales."

The three men drifted down to the bunkhouse, where the other three were playing seven-up, and Kales lost no time in feeling out the other cowboys.

"What are you fellers goin' to do?" asked Kales. "She's a long ways to the next range."

"That's the —— of it," growled Red disgustedly. "I'm broke—flat."

"You ain't got nothin' on me," grunted Swede. "I don't even own the saddle I'm ridin'."

"What's the answer to your question, Kales?" queried Boots Orson, who was a trifle more intelligent than the rest and felt that Kales' question was not idle curiosity.

"A certain job," stated Kales bluntly, "might mean a big stake or it might mean the penitentiary. Takes a lot of guts."

"You're talkin'," reminded Orson softly.

"Am I?"

Kales' eyes swept the circle of cowboys, but read only interest in their faces.

"You—show—us," said Red slowly, spacing his words widely. "I'm game."

"—— right!" breathed Swede. "Shoot."

"Did yuh ever hear of Sunbeam?" asked Kales.

"Yeah," nodded Swede. "Minin'-town, about fifty miles from Wheeler."

"Gold-minin' town," said Kales as if disputing Swede. "Lot of the yaller stuff shipped out of there, but nobody knows when."

"There ain't a —— mind-reader among us," grinned Red.

"That part's all fixed," explained Kales, nodding toward Roper. "He read the letter."

"I read a letter," agreed Roper, looking up from the manufacture of a cigaret. "It didn't fix nothin' for me."

"Lemme tell yuh about that letter," urged Kales. "That feller who wrote it is Pat Wheat, and an old bunkie of mine. He works for the express company as a shotgun messenger. That's how he knows things, I reckon.

"Me and him have been workin' for a big stake, and he knowed I was here; so he tips me off. Pat will be ridin' shotgun on this shipment, and she's a cinch that we'll crack out of here with a lot of *dinero*."

"Hold up the train?" queried Red.

"You're —— right. Cut off the baggage-car and take it a few miles. Won't have nobody to handle except the engine crew. Pat'll take care of the messenger."

"I *sabe* the place," grinned Roper joyously. "We can flag her down jist short of the S bridge, cut off the money-car and run down to the mouth of San Gregorio Cañon. She's a dinger of a place to make a getaway.

"Have the horses planted there, and we can ride the rocky bottom of that dry creek for a mile. Never leave a track."

"How about the rest of the train?" queried Boots. "There's six of us. Passengers pack money and jewelry."

Kales nodded slowly and stared at the ceiling for a while before he said:

"Yeah, that might be a good scheme, at that. We'll cut the telegraph wire. Won't be a —— of a lot of passengers, but it might pay to do it. If it was a reg'lar main-line train with sleepers, I'd say it wouldn't pay, but on a branch line like this it's a cinch to pile out or into them old cars."

"When do we git action?" queried Roper. "Did that letter say, 'Thursday'?"

"It did," nodded Kales; "and this is Tuesday. We'll work out the details later."

"Can't come too soon to suit me," yawned Red. "Since Cleve Hart got bumped off it's been kinda slow around here."

"Hart was a —— fool," declared Kales. "Any old time yuh start monkeyin' with women, you're a fool."

"Do yuh think that's why he got his?" asked Red.

"Cinch. He thought he'd run a blazer on that shepherd and take his woman, but he got his shirt filled with buckshot."

"Where'd this Sarg person figure in on the deal anyway?" queried Boots, who was with the sheriff when they arrested Skeeter Bill.

Kales grinned, showing some very bad-shaped teeth.

"Sarg never shot Hart. I know a few things about that long *hombre*, y'betcha. He's a pistol fighter, Sarg is; and a —— good shot. Do yuh think he'd pick up a shotgun when he had a loaded six-gun in his holster?

"Sarg pistol-whipped Sunbeam town, so they tells me, and pulled out without a scratch. I don't *sabe* what he's doin' down here, 'less he hired out his gun to the sheep outfits."

"Do yuh reckon the woman killed Hart?" queried Roper interestedly.

"She shore did, pardner."

Kales was emphatic.

"Hm-m-m," mused Roper.

He had seen Mrs. Kirk, and Roper was not overloaded with scruples.

"Freel's scared," observed Swede. "He ain't made no move to take Sarg to the penitentiary yet."

"Them boys from the Tin-Cup outfit swore they'd hang Sarg if they got a chance," stated Red, "and Freel ain't takin' no chances. They're sore at the judge for not hangin' Sarg.

"'Course the sheep are closer to the Tin-Cup than to any of the other outfits, and if the law decides in favor of sheep—blooey! They'll swarm plumb into Tin-Cup range. 'Course the law'll only give 'em an even break with the cattle; but the —— law don't stop to figure that cattle can't live on an even break with sheep."

"After that there sermon," stated Roper piously, "the choir will rise and sing. What in —— do we care what the sheep do to Moon Valley? We're leavin' here; *sabe?*"

"And with freight all paid," added Kales, grinning. "Tomorrow we all pull out, eh? Me and Dutch'll pull out from Crescent City after we've planted the fact that we're leavin' for good. We'll spring it that Roper and Swede left over Table Rock Pass t'day.

"Mebbe Red and Boots better stay here at the ranch. Might look bad if we all drifted at the same time, eh?

"And suppose we all meet in San Gregario Cañon, down near the mouth of it, about dark on Thursday? Me and Dutch'll have things framed, wires cut and all that."

The rest of the gang nodded in agreement, except Roper, who said:

"Let Boots pull out with Swede, and I'll stay here. I owe a few dollars in Crescent City, and I might want to come back here some day. I'll ride down with you and Dutch and then come back here."

"Well, that's all right," grunted Kales. "Fix it any old way yuh want to."

And thus are honest men drawn into evil paths through the need of a few dollars. But the question still remains: Who is an honest man, who is broke, with easy money in sight?

ROPER BATES had little stomach for a train-robbery, but he did have a little plan of his own. Money did not mean so much to Roper as a pretty face. He had seen Mrs. Kirk, and the memory of her caused him to calculate deeply.

Roper was not an ignorant person, but a queer kink in his mental make-up caused him to believe that it was inconsistent that this pretty woman should be the wife of a despised sheep-herder. To him it was very unreasonable; a condition to be remedied at once. He did not take the woman's position into consideration at all.

Roper was no handsome hero; rather he was a homely cow-puncher; but his mirror, if he ever used one, only reflected Roper Bates, which was sufficient for Roper Bates. He was a top-hand, a good pistol-shot and took a bath in the Summer. All of which raised him far above the level of sheep-herders.

He had no intentions of being at the mouth of San Gregario Cañon at dark; but he did not mention this fact, as it was nobody's business except his own. He was free, white and well past twenty-one. Also, on this particular Thursday he had imbibed freely of the juice that cheers, and the world was made up of pastel shades.

He lounged past the jail and almost ran into one of the Tin Cup punchers, known as "Jimmy Longhair," who seemed to be making an indifferent getaway from the rear of the jail. Jimmy was the long-haired puncher who had been with the sheriff at the capture of Skeeter Bill.

"*Hyah*, Hair," greeted Roper jovially. "How'sa dandruff?"

Jimmy Longhair glared evilly from under the floppy brim of his sombrero, but made no reply. He was a trifle touchy about his hair, but did not want to get tough with Roper Bates.

"Whatcha tryin' to do—break in the back door?" continued Roper, grinning.

"None of yore —— business!" growled Jimmy.

"Go to the head of the class," gulped Roper. "I betcha I know what yuh was tryin' to do. You Tin Cup snake-hunters want to lynch Sarg, and when yuh find that Freel won't let yuh, yuh sneak around tryin' to shoot him through the back winder."

"Aw-w-w, ——!" disgustedly. "No such a —— thing."

Roper rocked on his heels and considered Jimmy Longhair appraisingly.

"Listenin'?"

Jimmy proceeded to roll a cigaret, which gave him an alibi to neglect an answer. Then the door of the sheriff's office opened and shut, and Freel came past them. He barely looked at them, but neither gave him more than a passing glance.

"Listenin'," declared Roper again. "Jist like a —— cholo. I'd be 'shamed."

"You go to ——!" growled Jimmy.

"I betcha," nodded Roper soberly. "I betcha m' life."

Whether Roper was willing to bet his life on the truth of his statement or in agreement with Jimmy Longhair's order, made no difference to either of them. Roper turned on his heel and went after more bottled cheer, while Jimmy Longhair secured his bronco and hit the dusty road toward the Tin Cup ranch-house.

WHILE the rest of the Valley of the Moon folks moved along in their own dumb way, Skeeter Bill chafed in the confines of his small cell. Old Solitaire had beaten him something over two hundred times, which also got on his nerves to a certain extent. Freel had told him that his stay was not to be much longer, which did not serve to brace his spirits to any extent.

Skeeter Bill had gone over every inch of his cell, trying to dope out a scheme to escape; but that jail was not built for any such hope. Skeeter knew that he did not have one chance in a thousand to miss the wide doors of the penitentiary.

Freel brought in his supper, but did not seem in any mood for conversation.

"Anybody'd think you was the one

goin'. t' prison," observed Skeeter. "My gosh, yo're gloomy, Freel."

"Yeah? I hadn't noticed it, Sarg."

Freel sat and watched Skeeter eat his supper, and took away the dishes without a word. There was no question in Skeeter Bill's mind that Freel was worried over something.

Perhaps, he thought, there was danger of a lynching. Freel had told him of the threats that had emanated from the Tin Cup ranch, and Skeeter had heard enough about the Tin Cup gang to know that they were not given to idle gossip. Their immediate range was almost in smelling distance of the sheep outfits.

The Tin Cup gang had declared openly that a prison sentence was far too lenient for a sheep-herder who had killed a cattleman, and that they were willing to go on record as saying that Skeeter Bill would never serve one day in the penitentiary for this crime.

Because of this threat Freel had delayed taking Skeeter to the penitentiary. He did not want to lose his prisoner to a mob of lynchers, and he knew that a battle might result in dire calamity for the house of Freel.

As long as Skeeter Bill was behind the strong walls of the jail he knew that the Tin Cup outfit would not try to take him. They were no fools, and knew that the jail was built to withstand a heavy assault.

Skeeter Bill had stretched out on his bunk for the night, when Freel came to the cell door without a light and spoke to him. Skeeter got up, and Freel ordered him to dress.

From without came the dull rumble of thunder, and a weak flash seemed to light up the room a trifle.

"Goin' t' rain?" asked Skeeter.

"Hope to —— it rips things loose," said Freel softly. "Suits me fine. Dressed? Put this on."

He handed Skeeter a full-length slicker coat, which he put on.

"Gimme your right hand," whispered Freel, and Skeeter felt the circle of steel click around his wrist as Freel snapped the handcuff.

Another click showed that Freel had locked the other cuff to his own left wrist.

"Come on, easy," ordered Freel, and they went softly to the back door, which Freel unbarred, and they passed out into the night, which was as black as the proverbial black cat.

Gusts of wind filled the air with clouds of dust, and from the western range came the thudding roll of heavy thunder. The drouth of the valley of the Moon River was about to be broken.

Freel led Skeeter Bill wide of the town, the lights of which were blotted out in the dust-clouds and dark. They stumbled across the railroad track and swung back toward the depot, where Freel led Skeeter in behind a pile of old ties.

Lightning flashed across the sky, but even its light came to them in murky flares, owing to the dust.

"I reckon that —— is about to bust," said Freel.

"Let her bust," grunted Skeeter. "This is the first time I never was timid about —— bustin'."

"Couldn't have picked a better night," declared Freel with much satisfaction.

"That's right," agreed Skeeter. "I allus said it would be a wet night when I went to the penitentiary. I don't mind sneakin' out of the pen, but I hate like —— to have t' sneak into one."

"Rather be lynched?"

"Danged 'f I know. That's kind of a foolish question, don'tcha think? I ain't never talked with no folks after they've stretched hemp. It may be a —— of a lot of fun, but I wasn't raised t' look upon it as a pastime."

"Train comin'," grunted Freel as the headlight glowed far down the hazy distance and to their ears came the faint whistle of a locomotive.

Slowly the train ground to a stop at the station, and Freel led his prisoner to the front one of the two coaches. These cars were not vestibuled, but had open steps. Forty miles farther on, at the town of Cinnabar, they would connect with the main line, where the passengers might secure sleeping-car accommodations for the trip Eastward.

Through a whirl of wind and dust Freel and Skeeter Bill entered the smoking-car, where even the swinging oil lamps were dimmed by the dust, which seeped in through the window-casings and doors.

With a lurch the train started ahead again; but Freel seemed undecided about sitting down. Not over half a dozen men were in the smoker, and none of them paid any attention to Freel and Skeeter Bill.

"—— the dust!" choked Freel. "Let's try the rear car; it can't be any worse than this one."

The wind fairly tore the door-knob from Freel's hand, and they groped their way across the connecting platforms, a roaring, creaking, clattering maelstrom of wild elements and protesting wood and metal.

Into the door of the rear car they went while the door crashed shut behind them and weaved their way down the narrow aisle. A heavy lurch threw Skeeter almost into an occupied seat, and the jerk of the handcuffs swung Freel with him.

For a moment Skeeter balanced with his one free hand against the back of the seat, almost circling the neck of one of the occupants; and the face that stared up at him was the face of Mary Leeds.

AT THE approach to the S bridge, about two miles from Crescent City, four men—Kales, Bowen, Van Cleve and Orson—crouched near the track. Swede Sorenson had been left with the horses at San Gregario Cañon, and Roper Bates had never shown up.

A swirl of wind and rain caused them to hug the side of the fill, while overhead the lightning crackled wickedly. The great mass of storm-clouds seemed fairly to press against the earth, and the flashes of lightning seemed to bring only a gleam from the glistening rails.

"——'s recess!" swore Kales as he shielded a lantern inside his slicker, trying to light it.

The others crowded around him as he managed to get it lighted, and Van Cleve gave him a red handkerchief to tie around the chimney.

Kales braced himself against the wind and fought his way on to the track, where he placed the danger signal; but before he could get back to the rest, the wind hurled the lantern upside down, smashing the chimney.

"What'll we do now?" yelled Bowen into Kale's ear. "We can't light it ag'in!"

"Build a fire on the track!" yelled Van Cleve.

"Try it!" replied Kales bitterly. "You'd have a —— of a sweet time. Looks like we'd have to pass it up, boys."

"They'd never see a lantern in this storm anyway," cried Orson.

For several moments there was silence as each man tried to figure out some scheme for stopping the train. Suddenly the figure of a man almost brushed Kales' arm and climbed past him on to the road-bed. Several other men followed him closely—bulky, indistinct figures in the pall of rain, their footsteps drowned out in the roar of the elements. A few feet past, and they were blotted out.

"Who in —— was that?" roared Kales into Bowen's ear.

Bowen had no more idea than Kales had, and the other two added their questions.

"Sheriff and some men, do yuh think?" asked Kales.

"Mebbe Bates got drunk and talked too much," volunteered Van Cleve. "—— him, he never showed up!"

"I betcha he's got a gang to double-cross us!" yelled Orson. "Roper'd do that."

"—— 'em, they've got a light," swore Kales. "Look!"

Like a tiny pin-point of red, a light glowed down nearer the end of the bridge. It flickered as the storm beat down, and at times it disappeared entirely when the heavy wind howled out of the depths of Moon River.

"Roper must 'a' told!" declared Van Cleve.

"But the —— fool knowed we'd be here," argued Red at the top of his voice. "Mebbe he talked too much, but didn't tell about us goin' after the stuff."

That seemed more reasonable to Kales, and it began to look as if there might be a battle over the treasure.

"What's our move, Kales?" yelled Orson. "It's goin' to mean a battle, and the sheriff might ask questions of wounded men."

Kales had slid a Winchester carbine from under his slicker, and now he humped forward, resting it across the wet rail. For an instant the red light seemed to glow brighter, and the rifle report seemed weak in all that roaring world; but the red light glowed no more. It is doubtful if the report of the rifle could be heard fifty feet away.

Suddenly the elements seemed to combine in one mighty, roaring crash; and Kales and his men were flung against the bank of the fill, as if hurled and held by a mighty hand, and a solid wall of rain descended upon them.

For a moment they were stifled; but after the mighty deluge and roar there came a space of silence, as if the storm were preparing for another mighty onslaught; and in that brief space of silence, while the world seemed white from the lightning's glow, there came the splintering grind of tearing timbers and the hiss and roar of wild waters.

“My God!”

Kale's voice was a scream.

“The bridge! It's goin' out!”

“To —— with it!” yelled Bowen. “That old cloud——”

But the rest of his voice was swept away in the rush of wind, and the four men huddled low under the meager protection of the fill.

But Kales managed to grasp Bowen by the arm and yell into his ear:

“The train, you —— fool! It'll go into the river; don't yuh understand? Nothin' can stop it!”

Kales sprang to his feet and staggered on to the track just as two indistinct figures appeared out of the murk, coming from toward the bridge. They had discovered their shattered lantern and had come to investigate.

One of them fired at Kales, and the report of the gun sounded like the weak pop of a toy pistol. Kales staggered back as he swung up his carbine and fired. More men were coming out of the gloom, and Kales' men began shooting blindly.

Kales had been hit through the shoulder. After firing one shot his heel caught in the rail and he fell backward off the road-bed. Another whirl of rain blotted out the world, except for short, orange-colored flashes which seemed to dart here and there.

Kales got back to his feet, dizzy and sick, fighting to stay upright. He was a gunman, an outlaw, a man without a conscience; but the thought of that train running off the rail-ends of that ruined bridge, plunging into the swollen torrent, was as a nightmare to him.

Blindly he started down the track toward town, stumbling, weaving in the wind, which tore at his slicker with the tenacity of a bulldog. His left arm was useless, but with his right hand he clutched his six-shooter, while his lips repeated continually, as if he was afraid he might forget—

“One shot—close to trucks.”

IT WAS as a dream to Skeeter Bill—this looking into the eyes of Mary Leeds; and the awakening came when Freel yanked sharply on the handcuff. It was then that Mary Leeds shifted her eyes and saw that Skeeter Bill was linked to this other man. His eyes shifted to the other occupant of the seat and looked into the face of Mrs. Porter, erstwhile washer of shirts for Sunbeam town.

“Skeeter Bill Sarg!” exploded Mrs. Porter. “Well, I'll be everlastin'ly hornswoggled!”

“Yes'm,” said Skeeter foolishly; “me and you both.”

“Skeeter Bill,” parroted Mary, reaching out to him as if not believing her eyes.

“The same,” nodded Skeeter. “I—I——”

“C'm on,” ordered Freel, pulling on the handcuff.

Mary looked wonderingly at Freel and up at Skeeter.

“Me 'n' him are kinda close pals,” said Skeeter with a smile. “There's a tie that kinda binds us to each other.”

“I—I don't understand,” faltered Mary.

“F'r ——'s sake, whatcha handcuffed for?” demanded Mrs. Porter.

“Well—” Skeeter squinted at the storm-drenched window—“well, I'm takin' a long trip f'r murderin' a man.”

“You never did!”

Mrs. Porter got to her feet and turned on Freel, who did not understand what it was all about.

“You never murdered nobody!”

Mrs. Porter fairly snorted her unbelief.

“Yuh might 'a' killed a man, but he had an even break with yuh, boy.”

Skeeter smiled and shook his head.

“Anyway, it's too late t' argue it, Mrs. Porter. How's everybody in Sunbeam?”

Mrs. Porter did not seem interested in that question, for at that moment the shrill warning shriek of the locomotive whistle came to them, and they were all hurled into confusion, when the engineer threw his engine into reverse and opened the sand-box.

Mary Leeds and Mrs. Porter were thrown forward into the rear of the forward seat, while Skeeter Bill and Freel sprawled into each other in the aisle. There came a series of lurching jars which threatened to splinter the old coaches, and the train jerked to a standstill.

Freel and Skeeter were clawing blindly to get back on their feet when the rear door was flung open and two men came in—two masked men, carrying six-shooters. Freel lurched sidewise against the arm of a seat and whipped out a gun from his shoulder holster. One of the masked men fired at him, and the shot swung Freel back a trifle; but he fired deliberately, and the man who had shot him went down.

Another shot thudded into Freel; but he was shooting calmly, slowly; and the other man lurched back against the rear door, dropping his gun. His hat fell off, disclosing the long locks of Jimmy Longhair.

A shot was fired from the other door, and the bullet smashed into a basket of firebombs near the rear door.

"Tin Cup gang," said Freel hoarsely. "They—got—me."

He swayed back into Skeeter, who caught him in both arms, swung him up off the floor and lurched for the back door, which had swung open, letting in a flood of rain and wind. Jimmy Longhair swayed into him as he went past; but Skeeter Bill hurled him aside, sprang on to the platform, kicked at another man who was coming up the left-hand steps and sprang out into the darkness just as another bullet buzzed past his head.

Skeeter Bill had expected to strike solid ground within a short distance; but he seemed to be falling through great space, whirling in a pall of wind and rain.

Suddenly he shot feet first into the whirling river and seemed to go to a great depth—down—down—down until his lungs shrieked with the pain of it all; but he still kept both arms locked around the unconscious sheriff.

Then they seemed fairly to shoot out of the depths and were into the air again; out in a whirling world of floating bush, stumps, trees. It was impossible for him to see where they were or where they were going; but he realized that the train had stopped on the bridge, and that he had deliberately jumped into the Moon River.

Then something drove him sidewise, fairly hurling him through the water, and the roots of a tree whipped him across the face. Skeeter tried to grasp it with his free hand; but it eluded him, and in floundering for it his feet touched bottom and he felt a slackening of the rush of water.

"That danged tree shoved me out of the current," he told himself. "Whatcha know about that?"

Holding the sheriff tightly to himself, he moved carefully to the left, feeling with each foot. They were still neck-deep in the flood, but there was no longer any pressure against him.

Once he went into a hole over their heads, but got out quickly and felt the willows on the bank brush against his face. The bank was fairly high; but he managed to get Freel up ahead of him, after which he crawled out and lay flat on his face for several minutes, trying to collect himself.

Bill turned Freel over on his back and felt of his heart. It was still beating, but jerky.

"Pardner, I betcha yo're water-logged quite a lot," gurgled Skeeter. "I know —— well that I am. But you've likely got enough holes in yore carcass to drain yuh pretty quick."

Carefully he searched the sheriff's pockets until he found the key to the handcuffs. His wrist was cut and torn, but he chuckled with joy as the cuff opened easily and he was free once more.

"Now let 'em take me," he grunted wearily as he searched the sheriff for a gun; but there was none.

He had lost the gun in the car.

Skeeter got to his feet and tried to figure out which way to go. He was going back to see Kirk and get a gun. That was the least Kirk could do for him. He was going to win free; going to get a horse and a gun and the valley of Moon River would see him no more.

He moved slowly away into the brush, feeling his way carefully. Suddenly he stopped. The idea had just struck him that he might make folks think he was dead.

If he removed the handcuff from Freel and threw him in the river, who would know that they had ever been linked together? Mary Leeds and Mrs. Porter would in all probability never be questioned. And if they did, they would, or possibly might, tell a white lie to help him out. It was worth chancing.

He felt his way back to Freel and started to lift him up. It would be a simple matter to drop him over the bank. Freel would never suffer—never realize, because he was already unconscious, perhaps dying.

But suddenly the words of old Judge Tareyton came back to him:

"I know how yuh feel, Skeeter Bill. God put a spark of something into all of us—a spark that flares up once in a while. It will build a big flame for you—if you'll let it."

"That's right, judge," said Skeeter, staring into the darkness and rain, speaking aloud, but all unconscious of it. "Mebbe this is my spark workin'. Bein' a murderer don't set me free, old-timer. Yuh can't lie to yourself and get away with it."

Swinging the sheriff's unconscious body up in his arms, he stumbled away through the brush, going by instinct for the higher ground, while behind him the river roared as if in anger at being cheated.

SKALES' men did not long dispute with the Tin Cup gang. The game was not worth the candle to them, as they did not intend to battle for a chance to hold up the train, and also they did not know who the Tin Cup gang were.

While they believed that Roper Bates had talked too much and had given away the secret of the big gold shipment, the Tin Cup gang fought to keep any one from stopping them from taking Skeeter Bill off the train. Jimmy Longhair had heard the sheriff tell Skeeter that he was to leave very soon, and, with the gang planted near the bridge, Jimmy had watched the back door of the jail and had seen Skeeter and Freel come out.

"Monk" Clark, the owner of the Tin Cup, had sworn to "get" Skeeter Bill, and Monk was no idle boaster; but he did not reckon on interference.

The train was into them and lurching back against the reversed engine before they knew just what damage they had suffered; but Monk rallied his men and swung into the train, as it stopped on the last remaining arch of the bridge, with the pilot of the engine almost hanging out over the flood.

When Monk boarded the rear car, it was only to find that Skeeter Bill and the sheriff had gone overboard and that Jimmy Longhair and Benny Harper were down and out from the sheriff's six-shooter.

Things were looking extremely bad for the Tin Cup gang, and Monk lost no time in herding his men off the train, leaving their wounded. The train backed off the bridge and stopped, but the Tin Cup gang were already mounting and riding away. There was no question in the mind of Monk Clark that Skeeter Bill and Freel had died in the flood.

He gathered his men to him and delivered his orders:

"Boys, I don't know how many people seen or recognized us, nor how much we're goin' to be blamed for this; but we might as well be hung for goats as for sheep. Let's finish the business by wiping out every sheep-camp in the country. Make it one big night, and to —— with tomorrow."

Without a reply his men spurred ahead with him. They were already in bad and were willing to go the limit now.

Inside the train, all was confusion. No one seemed to know just what had happened; but the engine-crew knew that a warning torpedo had exploded just in time to prevent them from going into the river.

When the train backed off the bridge and stopped, Mrs. Porter and Mary Leeds got off the rear steps. They were both dazed over the swift succession of events, and Mrs. Porter swore piously when they heard some one say that the sheriff and his prisoner had jumped into the river.

Without knowing why they did it, both of them clawed their way alongside the train, trying to get back to the bridge; and when half-way the length of the train it started backing toward Crescent City, leaving them alone in the rain.

The beams of the receding headlight faded out in the storm, leaving them in total darkness. Neither was dressed for wet weather, and the drifting rain drenched them in a few minutes.

"Oh, why did he jump?" queried Mary Leeds, staring into the distance, where the waters hissed against the piling of the bridge.

"He took a chance, child," soothed Mrs. Porter. "When yuh look at it ca'm-like, the river ain't no worse than livin' out your life in the penitentiary."

"But he couldn't have been guilty," insisted Mary.

"Not of murder," agreed Mrs. Porter wearily; "but mebbe things broke so he couldn't prove it. Skeeter Bill would shoot, y' betcha. Prob'ly looked like murder to the law. You kinda liked Skeeter, didn't yuh, Mary?"

"I don't know," said Mary wistfully. "He is only a big, rough man, who does not deny that he is a lawbreaker, but he is honest and—when he smiles——"

"I know what yuh mean," said Mrs. Porter softly when Mary hesitated. "Bill was all right, y'betcha. Why, he never wore a shirt over a week, and he allus took off his hat t' me. I've seen him take off his hat t' honkatonk girls, too. Seems like he respected women—all of 'em—thataway."

Together they stood in the drenching rain and thought of Skeeter Bill. Finally Mrs. Porter said:

"Well, we ain't doin' poor Skeeter any good out here. God rest his soul, and that's about all I can say. I wonder how far it is back to a town."

Mary shook her head.

"I don't know. Somehow I have no desire to go anywhere. I feel so tired now."

"You need a good shot of booze," declared the practical Mrs. Porter. "We'll both catch a dandy cold in this rain. Come on, let's slop back to some town."

They started slowly down the railroad track, picking their way over the ties, which seemed to rise up and catch their feet. They could only see a few feet beyond them; but the storm seemed to be breaking, and already there were rifts in the clouds, where light strips hinted at a moonlight soon to come.

They had gone only about a hundred yards when they heard the crunching of gravel ahead of them, and a huge, misshapen thing seemed to rise up out of the brush beside the track and flounder out in front of them.

The two women clutched at each other in fear until a voice came to them—

"Pardner, you're harder t' handle than a salamander, and yuh weigh a ton."

"Skeeter!" called Mary wildly. "Skeeter Bill!"

"Huh!" grunted Skeeter and turned to meet Mary, who was stumbling down the track to him.

"You!" he panted. "You!"

And then wonderingly—

"Don't we meet in the dangdest places, ma'am?"

"You're not drowned?" asked Mary half-hysterically.

"No'm, I don't reckon so—not yet. Howdy, Mrs. Porter."

"Well, Bill Sarg!"

Mrs. Porter was half-crying.

"Well, you!"

"What'sa matter?" queried Skeeter. "And what are you folks doin' out here in the wet? Where's the train?"

"It went," said Mrs. Porter, waving one arm down the track. "We—we went to look into the river, I guess."

"Well," laughed Skeeter, shifting the weight of Freel's body, "I had all the looks I wanted. I jumped into the darned thing—me 'n' the sheriff. I dunno how he liked it. Reckon it was all right, 'cause he slept through it all."

"Wasn't he shot?" asked Mrs. Porter. "Them two men was shootin'——"

"Hit him twice, I think."

"But what was it all about?" asked Mary.

"Me," chuckled Skeeter. "Them fellers wanted t' take me away from the sheriff and make a tree decoration out of me."

"Hang yuh?" exclaimed Mrs. Porter.

"Yes'm, I suppose they had that in mind. They kinda hate sheep-herders."

"Was you herdin' sheep, Skeeter Bill?"

"Nope. It was just a case of bein' nice and handy to a sheep outfit, and no way t' prove a alibi. Of course them fellers ain't particular, Mrs. Porter. 'F they hated a laundry and caught me washin' m' shirt——"

"Whop!" exploded Mrs. Porter. "Don't drag the dirty shirts into this, Skeeter Bill. Whatcha goin' to do with the sheriff? 'F they catch yuh ag'in, won't they send yuh to the penitentiary?"

"Yes'm—'f they don't lynch me first; but I've gotta get help for the sheriff."

"Well, yuh ain't goin' back to town," declared Mrs. Porter. "You never murdered nobody, and you're a fool to shove your neck into a handy rope. Vamoose while the travelin' is wide open."

"Uh-huh."

Skeeter considered the idea thoughtfully.

"You can go to another country," added Mary Leeds.

"Well, I've gotta get this sheriff—I know what I can do. By cripes, I'll pack him to Kirk's camp and let him haul Freel t' Crescent City. 'F I ain't mistaken, I can travel to the right and hit that sheep outfit dead center. You folks keep straight down the railroad, and you'll hit Crescent City."

"Not me!" declared Mrs. Porter. "If you're goin' huntin' for a sheep-camp in the dark, I'm goin' along."

"I shall go too," said Mary firmly.

"Whatcha goin' to do?" grumbled Skeeter. "Two t' one, and I'm loaded down. It ain't reasonable—not any; but mebbe yo're just as well off. It's a —— of a trip, any old way yuh take it. C'm on. We've gotta get out of this cut before we can start across-country."

It was at least two hundred yards to where the cut opened into more level country. Just before they reached the end of the cut a bulky object seemed to drag itself across the rails and halted in the center of the track.

The two women hung back, not realizing that it was a man; but Skeeter Bill plodded on with his burden until he reached the prone figure stretched between the rails.

"More danged cripples around here!" exclaimed Skeeter Bill, peering down at the man. "Who are you, pardner?"

"I'm Kales," panted the man. "Nick Kales."

Skeeter eased his burden to the ground.

"Kales, eh? I 'member you, Kales. You said that the judge didn't have any guts, 'cause he didn't hang me."

But Kales had collapsed again and did not answer.

"Must 'a' been one of the gang who tried to hold up the train," said Skeeter. "Got plugged for his trouble."

Skeeter dug into Kales' pockets and secured matches, which he proceeded to light in order to examine Kales' hurts.

"He sure got plugged," nodded Skeeter. "I dunno how many times he got hit, but it looks like his gun busted and tore his right hand all to thunder. Hm-m-m!"

"Almost got enough to start a hospital," observed Mrs. Porter.

Skeeter was searching Kales' pockets again. In the outside pocket of the slicker he found a full bottle of whisky. He drew out the cork and forced some of it into the outlaw's mouth. Kales strangled and tried to sit up.

"Here, take a drink," urged Skeeter, and succeeded in getting a fair-sized drink down Kales' throat.

"Feel better?"

Kales coughed and tried to get to his feet.

"Hang on to yourself," advised Skeeter. "Take it easy until yuh feel better."

But Kales got to his feet and clung to Skeeter, talking incoherently.

"Can yuh walk?" asked Skeeter.

"Walk?" muttered Kales. "Walk?"

"Yeah—move your feet for'ard and back and carry yore body along at the same time. I betcha he can," continued Skeeter; and then to Mrs. Porter: "Can yuh kindly help hang on to him? I reckon we'll add him to our collection."

"He came here to lynch you."

Mrs. Porter was a trifle indignant at the idea of taking Kales along.

"Yeah, tha's a fact," admitted Skeeter Bill; "but he fell down on the job. Let's go."

He swung the inert Freel back across his shoulder and started off down the track, with the stumbling Kales hanging to the sleeve of his coat and being assisted to some extent by Mrs. Porter. Bringing up the rear came Mary Leeds, wanting to be of help to some one, but unable to decide just where to begin.

ROPER BATES had consumed considerable whisky that day, but had not succeeded in getting so drunk that he forgot his plans. It was after dark when he rode away from Crescent City, heading toward Kirk's sheep-camp.

The fact that a big storm was coming did not bother Roper Bates. His mind still carried a picture of the pretty woman at the sheep-camp, and he was sufficiently filled with liquor actually to believe that he was going to do her a real favor by taking her away from her plebeian husband.

The last quarter of a mile he rode in a whirl of dust while the thunder jarred the world about him; but he was storm-proof. He dismounted near the door, and his horse immediately moved into the shelter of the cabin wall.

The door was not barred; so Roper Bates surged inside and shut the door behind him. The cabin was lighted with a single lantern, which swayed from a rafter, and it took him several moments to get his dust-filled eyes accustomed to the dim light.

The pretty woman was sitting on the edge of the built-in bunk, staring at him. There was some one in the bunk, who moved restlessly and coughed dryly.

"What do you want here?" asked the woman hoarsely.

"Me?"

Roper Bates wiped his lips with the back of his hand. He did not know what to say just then. From overhead came a crashing snap of thunder, and the woman seemed to crouch lower on the bunk. Successive flashes of lightning made the room bright with a white glare.

Roper moved in a little closer and stared at the man in the bunk. He could see the man's face now; it was very pale.

"What'sa matter—sick?" asked Roper thickly.

The woman nodded dumbly, and turned to put her hand on the sick man's forehead. She turned back and repeated her question—

"What do you want here?"

"I—dunno."

Roper Bates really did not know. Somehow he seemed to forget just why he had come there.

"Been sick long?"

Roper jerked his head toward the sick man.

"Three days and nights," nodded the woman. "I haven't had any sleep, and no one comes here."

"Three days and nights," parroted Roper. "You been settin' there all that time?"

"I haven't slept," she corrected him wearily.

"Nobody to help yuh?"

Roper shook his head, as if answering his own question.

"Nobody? For ——'s sake!"

He moved in close to the side of the bed and looked down at Kirk.

"He's the sheep-herder, ain't he?"

"Yes—and my husband," defiantly.

"Uh-huh—your husband," agreed Roper thoughtfully. "A sheep-herder for a husband."

Mrs. Kirk got up from the bunk and faced Roper Bates.

"What difference does that make?" she demanded. "We took this job together. If he's a sheep-herder, so am I. No matter if he does herd sheep—he's as good as you are."

"Good as I am," parroted Roper thoughtfully.

"He had to live in the hills, and there was nothing else for him to do. We had to live."

"Had to," agreed Roper slowly.

"And he's my husband," repeated Mrs. Kirk, very near to the verge of a breakdown, "and I love him more than anything in the world."

Roper peered closely at her and looked at the man in the bunk.

"More 'n anythin'—in—the—world! Well, I'll be eternally ——!" blurted Roper.

It was beyond his comprehension; yet he could get a glimmering of the idea.

"And nobody ever comes here," said Mrs. Kirk bitterly. "They hate a sheep-herder so much that nobody cares what becomes of us."

"Ain't it ——?" agreed Roper. "Now, ain't it, though?"

The little cabin shook in the heavy wind, and the rain beat in through the walls and the patched window-panes.

"Stormin' outside," observed Roper vacantly, and grinned at his own wit as he added, "and some of it's comin' in out of the wet."

Suddenly he turned to Mrs. Kirk.

"You ain't scared of me, are yuh?"

"No, I am not afraid of you. Why should I be?"

Roper did not say, but studied the face of the sick man for a while before he looked up at Mrs. Kirk.

"Yuh say yuh love him—more 'n—anythin'—even if he is a sheep-herder?"

"God knows I do. Why do you ask me that question?"

"And yuh ain't afraid of me?"

"Not one bit," declared Mrs. Kirk. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Stay and help yuh all I can, ma'am. I ain't one of them lousy persons which looks down upon a sheep-herder. I reckon yore husband is quite some top-hand, when he's up and doin' his stuff."

"Jim is my pal."

"Whatcha know?" grunted Roper. "Whatcha know? Ma'am, you lay down and take a nap, and I'll take care of him."

There was one home-made rocking-chair in the room, and Mrs. Kirk sat down in it.

"I can not sleep, but it is a godsend to have some one here to talk with," she said wearily.

"Yes'm," nodded Roper slowly. "Nobody ever called me that name before, but it's all right, I reckon."

He slowly rolled a cigaret, and as he drew his lips across the edge of the paper he glanced at Mrs. Kirk. She had fallen asleep, with her head pillowed in her arm.

For a long time Roper stared at the floor, with the unlighted cigaret between his lips. He was trying to solve a problem which has never been answered; nor will it ever be, "Why does this woman love this man?"

Roper studied the face of the sick man. Kirk was a very ordinary-looking man. He was not big. Roper shook his head. It was a problem far beyond his ken.

He sifted the tobacco out of his cigaret paper and humped over with his chin in his hands. He had come there to take that woman away from her undeserving husband; and here he was, acting as nurse to that very husband.

For the better part of an hour he sat there like a statue, thinking of things that had never entered his head before. He did not want that woman now, and he wondered why he had ever wanted her. Where did he ever get the idea of taking her away from her husband?

Suddenly he heard the thudding of horses' hoofs as a body of horsemen drew rein at the doorway. A man's voice cursed openly—

"Git out of this, you —— sheep-herders!"

The voice aroused Mrs. Kirk, and she sat up, staring around. Somebody stumbled over the step and grasped the door. Roper Bates knew what it meant. The cattle-men had come to clean up the sheep-camps.

Suddenly the door was flung open, and three men filled the doorway. Quick as a flash Roper Bates threw up his six-shooter and fired at the lead man, who had a Winchester rifle leveled from his shoulder.

The man seemed to spin on his heel, and the rifle discharged into the ceiling, while the other men shot back with him as they jerked him out of the doorway. The door swung shut behind them, and Roper Bates' last shot splintered the edge of it as it closed.

The room was full of powder-smoke. Mrs. Kirk had darted to the bunk as if to try to protect her husband, while Roper Bates was half-kneeling in the middle of the room, stuffing cartridges into his six-shooter.

"Got me in the leg," he grunted; "but I made 'em pay for comin' in without knockin'."

He got carefully to his feet, yanked a blanket off the bed and managed to stumble over to the window, where he flung the blanket across the rough frame, cutting out the view from outside.

A bullet flicked in through the window and tore a slash in the blanket, but the latter remained in place. Roper was hopping on one foot along the wall, getting close to the door, when a man called from without—

"—— you, we're comin' after yuh!"

"Come on!" challenged Roper. "Open that door and grab a harp."

Several bullets splintered through the door following his defiance, and one of them bit deeply into Roper's ribs. He swayed closer to the door, but did not waste lead in reply.

Mrs. Kirk saw that Roper had been hit hard and started toward him, but he waved her back.

"Oh, why don't you let them in?" she begged. "They will not hurt you. Why do you fight for us?"

"This ain't no job for a woman and a sick man," he stated hoarsely, "and it's 'bout all I'm good fer."

"Why did we ever come here?" said Mrs. Kirk weakly.

Roper turned his white face toward her and shook his head.

"Ma'am, I've asked m'self that same question. Down in Indiany, they farm with a plow instead of a six-gun. But I never left there of my own accord. I was only three year old, and m' folks kinda hoodled me along with them."

Roper was deadly serious. He was bleeding badly and barely able to brace himself against the log wall.

"If you don't come out of there you'll wish to —— yuh had!" yelled a voice.

"And if you come in here you'll wish t' —— yuh hadn't," answered Roper.

Another bullet splintered the door near the latch and thudded harmlessly into the wall.

From without came the sound of earnest conversation, and a voice called again.

"We're goin' to stampede your sheep, and if you ain't out of there when we come back we'll dynamite your shack."

There came the sound of horses speeding away over the wet ground. Roper walked dizzily back to the table, where he sat down heavily in the rocking-chair.

"We must get out of here."

Mrs. Kirk was nervously looking around the room, as if debating just what to save from the promised dynamiting.

"Tha's all right," grunted Roper dazedly. "Don'tcha worry. Them jaspers ain't got no dynamite; but I'm bettin' they've got some respect for a sheep-herder now."

"But we must get to a doctor—for—you."

"Never mind me, ma'am. Ain't nobody worryin' about me. I'm jist Roper Bates, cow-puncher. Got a hole in m' leg and one in m' bellows, but I'm feelin' fine, y' betcha—betcha."

Roper Bates sank lower in his chair, and the heavy six-shooter fell to the floor.

IT WAS a sadly bedraggled party which picked its way through the dark. There were no lights to guide them, no trail nor road. Skeeter Bill, under the double burden of Kales and Freel, traveled by instinct. Kales babbled meaningless things and wanted to lie down, but

Skeeter doled out bad whisky to him and steadied him on one side, while Mrs. Porter guided him from the opposite side.

Through mesquite and sage they blundered along, sliding into washouts partly filled with muddy water, falling over rocks, crashing into brier patches, where the women left sections of their clothes.

As in a dream Mary Leeds followed. She had no sense of direction, and her feet had long since lost any sense of feeling. She was reduced to a mere dumb creature, following the man she loved. Ahead of her he struggled; a huge, queer-shaped hulk, uncomplaining, patient.

"Ain't you tired, Skeeter Bill?" asked Mrs. Porter.

"Years and years ago," laughed Skeeter; "but I'm sure paralyzed now. Mr. Kales, I wish you'd watch where yo're puttin' yore feet. I don't mind walkin' on m' feet, but I hate like —— t' have you doin' it."

From afar came the sound of firing as the Tin Cup gang rounded up and stampeded the sheep. Skeeter stopped and listened for a moment and hurried on.

"I'm scared," admitted Skeeter. "Scared that somethin' is happenin' to the pals."

"Who are the pals?" panted Mrs. Porter.

"Man and his wife. He's sick and she's stickin' to him. Sheep-herder."

Skeeter shifted his burden slightly.

"They ain't jist husband and wife—they're pals—bunkies," he went on. "*Sabe* what I mean, Mrs. Porter?"

"I think so, Skeeter Bill."

"Dangdest thing I ever seen," said Skeeter. "Kinda gives a feller a new idea of a wife. 'F a feller had a wife that was a pal t' him— Say, by cripes, we found the shack!"

Just beyond them loomed the outlines of the little sheep cabin, but without a light showing.

"Lemme do the talkin'," said Skeeter. "It ain't safe to be a stranger around here."

Skeeter went close to the door and called:

"Mrs. Kirk! Yoohoo! Mrs. Kirk!"

For several moments there was silence, and then—

"Who is it?"

Mrs. Kirk's voice sounded very weak.

"Skeeter Bill Sarg, who went after groceries."

The splintered door creaked, and a faint light came from the interior.

"Why, I—I—" stammered Mrs. Kirk, astonished beyond measure to hear his voice.

She stepped aside and stared white-faced at Skeeter and his burden and at the others with him. Skeeter stared at Roper Bates, asprawl in the chair, and at the form under the blankets on the bed.

He lowered Freel to the floor and propped Kales up between the table and the wall. Mary Leeds and Mrs. Porter were staring at Mrs. Kirk while Skeeter Bill chafed his benumbed arms and neck and haltingly introduced them.

"What's he doin' here?" asked Skeeter, pointing at Roper Bates.

Haltingly Mrs. Kirk told of what had happened a short time before, while Roper Bates roused up sufficiently to look around dazedly. He looked from Mrs. Kirk to Skeeter Bill and nodded weakly.

"Pals," he whispered. "Him—and—her."

"Y'betcha, pardner," nodded Skeeter, and walked over to the bunk, where he looked down at Kirk.

Bill went back to Freel and examined him. The sheriff was still alive, but unconscious. Kales was still mumbling incoherent things, but was too weak to do more than hold up his head.

"Kirk's better off here than anywhere else," stated Skeeter Bill; "but I've gotta git the rest of the cripples to a doctor pretty danged quick. Yuh still got the old horse and the wagon, Mrs. Kirk?"

Mrs. Kirk nodded, and Skeeter turned to Mrs. Porter.

"You keep house here while I hitch up."

"But you can't go back to town," declared Mrs. Porter. "They'll——"

"I betcha they will," smiled Skeeter; "but it's a case of three t' one. 'F I don't hand these three men over to a doctor they'll all die."

Skeeter patted Mrs. Porter on the shoulder as he started for the door.

"Mebbe they'll only send me to the penitentiary, yuh see."

It was only a few minutes' work for Skeeter to hitch up the old horse and drive up to the door. He carried the three men out of the house and placed them in the wagon-box on an old quilt.

"You and Mary stay here with Mrs. Kirk," said Skeeter to Mrs. Porter. "I'll see that somebody comes after yuh in the mornin'."

He turned to Mrs. Kirk and held out his hand.

"'F I don't see yuh ag'in—good luck t' you and yore pal."

"Well, we'll sure see yuh, won't we?" queried Mrs. Porter quickly.

"I shore hope so, but yuh can't sometimes always tell. Mebbe I better tell you folks good-by, too."

"Aw, ——!" blurted Mrs. Porter inelegantly and turned back into the shack, while Mary Leeds came slowly up to Skeeter and took hold of his sleeve.

"Skeeter Bill, can't I go with you?"

"I— Mebbe yuh better not," softly. "She's a rough old road, and yuh can't tell what might——"

"Does a pal mind rough old roads, Skeeter Bill?"

Mary was looking up into his face, a world of yearning in her eyes. Skeeter's hand came up and touched her drenched, wind-blown hair for a moment, and he shook his head.

"There are no rough roads to a pal," said Mary; and without a word Skeeter Bill helped her on to the rickety seat.

* * *

CRESCENT CITY was greatly excited over the events of the evening. The storm had taken a great toll in property, and the town was filled with ranchers whose places had been flooded in the big cloud-burst.

The train had backed into town, bringing two badly wounded men and a tale of a narrow escape from going into the river and of a mysterious hold-up, in which the sheriff and his prisoner had perished in the river. And to cap it all, a wounded sheep-herder had ridden into town and told of a gang of raiders who had destroyed his camp and herd.

Jimmy Longhair and Bennie Harper, the two men who had been shot by the sheriff, were stretched out in the Moon River saloon and gambling-house while a doctor worked over them. The place was filled with hard-faced cattle-men who argued and declared pro and con.

Among those present were Bowen, Van Cleve and Orson. Swede Sorenson was still in San Gregario Cañon, unable to cross the river back to the Lazy H, and not knowing what had happened to their well-laid plans.

None of the three had been hurt in the skirmish with the Tin Cup gang, and had walked back to Crescent City. None of them had the slightest idea where Kales was; but they were under the impression that Kales had been shot. They did not know whether to stay in town or to make a get-away while the going was good.

Judge Grayson, who had been summoned, was greatly affected over the news of Freel's death. He tried to get some kind of a statement from Longhair or Harper, but both of them refused to talk. They were both from the Tin Cup ranch, but they would say nothing to implicate any more of their outfit.

The train crew were in the saloon, adding their voices to the general hum of conversation. It had been a narrow escape for them, and they were willing to admit that they were very fortunate to be alive.

"I heard that torpedo," stated the engineer, a grizzled old veteran, "and I hossed over the old Johnson-bar. The wind usually blows away the sand, but I guess the Lord was with us this time, 'cause it stayed on the rail. We sure upset folks a-plenty, but stopped with the pilot hangin' out over the water. Wouldn't have been a chance in the world except for that torpedo."

"Who placed the torpedo?" queried the judge. "And what do you mean by a torpedo?"

"It's a little metal case which is fastened to the rail," explained the engineer. "It's flat on each end and high in the center, with lead straps to clamp onto the rail. When the engine wheel hits it, the thing pops loud. Two of 'em is a slow-signal, ordering you to go cautious, but when only one pops, you better stop quick."

"I understand," nodded the judge. "But who placed that one on the rail?"

No one seemed to know.

"I don't know who put it there—" the engineer shook his head—"but I do know that he saved a lot of us this night."

"Amen to that," agreed the judge.

Suddenly there was a commotion at the door, excited voices, the scrape of footsteps; and in came Skeeter Bill, carrying the sheriff in his arms. The crowd parted and let him through. He placed the sheriff on the floor, turned and went back out of the door, while men crowded around and looked down at Freel, who was still alive.

Before any one had time to call the doctor from his labors with the other two men Skeeter came back in with Kales. He placed him with Freel and went back without a word.

"My God!" exclaimed the judge piously. "What next?"

Back came Skeeter Bill again. This time he was carrying Roper Bates, and following him was Mary Leeds. Skeeter placed Roper on the floor and stood aside as the doctor came bustling through the crowd, answering some one's hail.

Men looked queerly at Skeeter, but no one made any move to interfere with his freedom. Swiftly the doctor worked in his examination. Bowen, Orson and Van Cleve moved close together and watched closely, hoping against hope that Kales had not, and would not, tell what he knew.

"Any chance for them, doctor?" asked the judge.

"Yes, I think so. Freel is badly hurt, but is suffering mostly from loss of blood. This other man—" indicating Bates—"has been hit twice, but I think he will recover. This third man has a nasty hole in his shoulder, and he appears to have lost nearly all the fingers on his right hand. Perhaps his pistol exploded. Who is he?"

"Name's Kales," said a bystander. "Hired gunman."

Kales stirred and opened his eyes, looking curiously up at the circle of faces.

"Did it stop?" he whispered weakly. "The train?"

"It stopped in time," said the judge.

"Dropped—my—gun."

Kales spaced his words widely, and frowned heavily as if in deep thought.

"I knowed that it took one torpedo to stop the train."

He stopped and took a deep breath.

"Women and children—men—the—bridge—gone. No—gun—so—I——"

Kales tried to smile but only succeeded in contorting his homely face.

"The wind was too strong—blew—the—cartridge—off—the—rail—so—I——"

He licked his lips and tried to lift his injured hand, but the effort was too great.

"I—I held it on the rail."

"God!" cried the engineer wonderingly. "He lost his hand from holding a cartridge on the track."

"A hired gunman," said Skeeter Bill softly. "A paid killer."

"Where did Roper Bates come in on this?" demanded a bearded cow-man.

Roper Bates was trying to sit up, and one of the crowd assisted him while another gave him a drink of liquor.

More men were coming into the door, clumping heavily in their wet boots. They shoved to the front—the Tin Cup outfit, with Monk Clark at their head. He looked at Skeeter Bill and blinked his eyes rapidly. It was like looking at a ghost. His eyes switched to the three men on the floor, and Roper Bates was looking up at him.

Clark's men had halted behind him. One of them pointed at Skeeter and said:

"There's the —— murderin' sheep-herder, Monk! He didn't drown."

Mary Leeds moved in closer to Skeeter, and he put an arm around her.

"Murderin' ——!" gasped Roper Bates. "He only killed a man, Monk. You and your gang tried to kill a woman. If I hadn't been there you'd 'a' done it, too."

The man who had given Roper Bates the drink was forcing a drink between Freel's lips, and Freel choked over the fiery liquor. The man lifted Freel's head a little higher, and Freel's eyes slowly opened.

For a full minute he studied the crowd, and his eyes shifted to Skeeter Bill.

"What—happened?" he muttered. "They—shot——"

"I jumped into the river with yuh," smiled Skeeter, "and then I packed yuh plumb over to the sheep-herder's shack and then brought yuh here."

Freel digested this as he studied Skeeter closely.

"You unlocked the handcuffs—when?"

"After I got yuh out of the river."

"And—you—stayed?"

Skeeter's mind flashed back to the bank of the river, in the drenching storm and darkness, when he started to toss the sheriff back into the flood.

"Yeah," said Skeeter slowly. "I stayed."

"You—had—your—chance," said Freel painfully.

"I know I did."

Skeeter's voice held no regrets.

"I could 'a' got away, Freel." he went on. "But you wasn't to blame for what was bein' done t' me. You was only doin' your duty."

Freel motioned for another drink, and the man gave him a generous portion.

"Duty!"

Freel's voice was so low that the crowd shifted in closer to hear what he was saying.

"I was doin' my duty, Sarg? No, I wasn't. I was glad the judge gave you life, instead of the rope. I'll tell you why."

Freel's eyes shifted around the crowd, and he nodded.

"Remember the day Cleve Hart was killed? I got shot that day—just a scratch. I was in that sheep-herder's cabin when Cleve Hart came. He—they told me he had said things about the woman who lived there.

"I picked up the shotgun and came out. Maybe he didn't recognize me, but he shot. I killed him and rode away."

"You killed him!" exclaimed the judge. "You?"

"Me," admitted the sheriff. "I—got—scared — afterwards. I'm — a — coward, judge."

Men looked at each other in amazement, and many of them looked at Skeeter Bill, who had his arms around Mary Leeds and was staring into space.

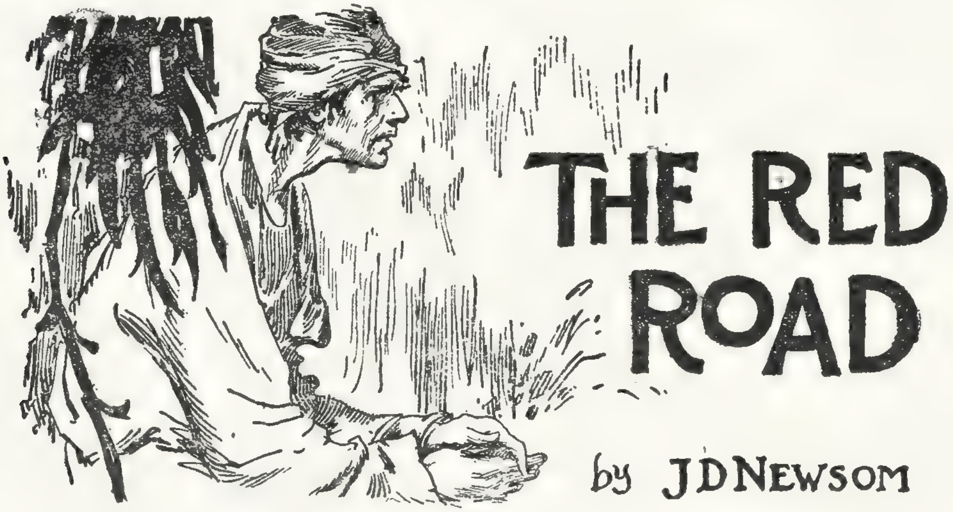
"Judge," called Freel softly. "Listen to me, judge. Will you find McClelland? I think he's in Cinnibar now. Tell him I said to take these —— sheep out of the valley of Moon River right away."

"Why, how can you order them out?" asked the judge.

"They — belong — to — me, judge. I —I—didn't—know—they'd—start—so—much—trouble."

Skeeter Bill moved slowly toward the door with his arm around Mary Leeds, and the Tin Cup gang, yet to pay for their misdeeds, removed their hats as the lanky cowpuncher and the girl went past, paying no heed to any one.

Outside, they climbed on to the rickety seat, turned the old gray horse around and started back toward the sheep-camp. The old wagon creaked in every joint, protesting against such continuous service; and the old gray horse shuffled along over the wet, misty road, taking its own gait, while two figures sat very close together on the lop-sided seat—two pals who found each other in the storm.



THE RED ROAD

by JDNewsom

Author of "The Naked Truth," "Bad Luck," etc.

CIVILIZATION! O-ho, that is a very big word for a very little thing. I have seen it from Saigon to Sydney, from Penang to Nouméa.

It brings wealth and learning, you say? That is all on the surface, as a fat body may conceal a diseased liver. It has brought us the train and the words that fly on the wire and the big buildings at Saigon? All this is true, but it cannot change the heart of a people. No, neither the heart of a white man, nor a yellow man, nor a black man. I have seen and I know.

Before the white man came we had this thing—civilization—but we did not prattle about it like conceited children. Learning we knew, and wealth and poverty and power and kindness. There is nothing new but the train and the words that fly on the wire and the tall buildings. But in the end

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are we nearer the peace of the Master than we were in the beginning? That, in truth, cannot be admitted.

But the white man-child builds a road to a mine and says:

"Behold! This is civilization, for thus can we more quickly wrench the bowels from the earth. Thus many men shall labor in the blackness and be paid for their toil."

Then if the mine be rich the train follows by the roadside and tall buildings spring from the ground. But the white man alone profits by these things as may be observed by any one who is not deafened by long words.

Our fathers had a proverb, "If a man has two loaves of bread, let him sell one and buy a lily." Tell that to a white man and see him laugh.

Civilization! And that other shorter word—Progress! They repeat it as a Buddhist priest repeats the sacred formula "*Om Mani padme hum*"—the jewel is in the lotus. Progress! Then civilization is the lotus where the jewel of progress scintillates. But these are words—idle and dangerous.

There is no progress, there can be no real civilization until the heart of man, following the Three Teachings, is ready to receive wisdom and pour out mercy. Though they babble, and bring soldiers to enforce their babblings, the white men are as far from the truth as any others. I have seen and I know.

When I was young—*hai mai!* and that is a very long time ago—I was sent to the temple at Colombo to acquire knowledge. Later I went to Benares. But there was a fever in my blood and my feet in the dust were restless. I traveled—not for any good purpose but because I was self-seeking and vain. Thus I came, after many hardships, back to the Eightfold Way. I have seen a little, enough to know that until the hearts of men change, those words "civilization" and "progress" are but little sounds in an awful void.

How did I regain the Right Way, the Eightfold Way? Listen then and my old lips shall tell.

OUT across the ocean to the south, beyond Sumatra and Borneo, there are many islands, big and little, but the richest of them all is New Caledonia, which belongs as our land does to the French. At first they used this remote island as a prison to which were sent all those who had broken the laws of their native land.

Then their engineers found minerals hidden beneath the hills and civilization ousted the penitentiary. That is to say the prisoners were sent to labor in the mines and to make roads. But even in their thousands they were too few, for the climate broke them and killed them more rapidly than they could be sent out from their native land. So the officials came to Saigon and to many other places saying, "Come to Nouméa, we shall pay you and feed you."

I went. Many things befell and my knowledge was increased thereby. I saw the very dregs of mankind being driven lower still. I saw my own kin ground down by the senseless machine. I saw and felt the rush for wealth which strews its track with wrecks and failures.

Hai mai! It was a land of enchantment in the beginning—hills reaching to the blue skies, green waters and white sands, where the black people lived worshipping strange gods. But there was nickel beneath the hills and the black folk melted away as the white men crept upwards from the sea, following the new-made roads.

These things I heard, but did not witness for in my days the northern part of the island remained unknown because it was supposed to be poor in mineral wealth.

After I had been in Nouméa for two years a man came to see my master and shouted aloud that he had just discovered a mineral called chrome in the hills at a place called Tihouen. He was a thin man with a drooping mustache and bright eyes shot with yellow lights. This much I remember of him.

Now my master, whose name was Guichard, was tall and slow of speech. His face was always smiling and he was reputed wise and just.

"Oh," he said. "Chrome! That is very fine, Boulan. You will make a fortune."

"Fortune! Fortune!" Even now I can hear Boulan spluttering in that explosive way of his. "Ten fortunes! It stands out black in the face of the hills it is so rich!"

My master slapped him on the back in high good humor.

"And why have you come to me, Boulan?" he asked. "What can I do—except offer you the congratulations of a hard-working official."

The yellow light shot across Boulan's eyes.

"You know where it is," he whispered—I was in the next room and the door was open, but no one bothered about a coolie—"It is at Tihouen. The journey is a nightmare. That is why I have come to you."

Guichard raised his hands to the ceiling and laughed.

"Tihouen! My good Boulan, it might as well be in Heaven. It won't be of any use even to your grandchildren."

Boulan wrung his hands and moaned:

"I have the concession all in order from the Survey Bureau. It belongs to me."

"Yes," Guichard smiled benevolently. "But unless you can get the ore down to the coast——"

He left the sentence unfinished and Boulan walked up and down the room, breathing heavily.

"You are influential," he said at last. "If you could get a road made from Bourail to Tihouen."

"Roads," Guichard agreed, "are my sole purpose in this island. I was born to build highways that others might prosper."

He laughed when he had said this and watched Boulan through narrowed eyes.

"You have not suffered any loss," Boulan retorted. "I remember the Mortier affair and Narboth's track and——"

"Yes, yes," hastily agreed Guichard. "I see you have come to me for a definite reason. What is it you propose then?"

"Get this road built, and I shall give you a sixth share in the profits."

Guichard laughed but said nothing.

"I have two children and a home in Bordeaux," pleaded Boulan. "I need the money, but I will offer you a fifth."

Guichard lighted his pipe in silence.

"A quarter," at last murmured Boulan.

"We shall see," said Guichard.

A week later they met again and I served them with absinthe on the veranda overlooking the harbor. Boulan was thinner than ever and the skin on his face was drawn tight and yellow like that of a man suffering from fever.

"What is the news?" he asked. "Tell me quickly for I am eaten with anxiety."

Guichard looked down at him and then out across the bay where the water lay as smooth as glass, and as still as death.

"I have spoken to the Governor," he answered, sipping his absinthe, "and the Council has approved. I shall build the road. I was forced to buy some land next to yours because the regulations will not allow a road to be constructed for the benefit of one man only."

"You have been to Tihouen!" exclaimed Boulan, his voice catching in his throat.

"No," Guichard chuckled. "I went to the Survey Bureau and purchased a strip of land just to the east of your concession. Don't you think, as this was done for your good, that I should be compensated?"

Boulan drained his glass at one gulp and then ran his hand through his thin hair.

"I have barely enough capital left to start operations," he answered. "Your land may be very valuable, why not keep it?"

"You have read my mind." Guichard was jovial and very pleasant. "I shall not sell, but nevertheless as I am doing this for you, it seems only fair that you should defray such expenses."

Boulan buried his face in his hands and I thought he would sob, but he murmured:

"If you insist I suppose I must agree. Will you wait until my first profits come in?"

"Not a day," laughed Guichard. "Not a single day. Business is business."

The yellow light gleamed in Boulan's eyes as he raised his head.

"What will you do if I go to the Council——"

"Nothing. Your standing is none too good at present. The Council have reason to believe in me."

"Oh, well," sighed Boulan, crumpling up in his chair. "I agree. When the road is built I shall be able to put my affairs in order. Since I lost the *Jean Bart* off Tana I have been facing ruin. I shall have just enough money to start operations."

Now you must remember that my master, among his own kind, was an influential man. He dined at Government House, he presided at festivals, he distributed prizes in the school where the children of the freed convicts received their education. And his home on the hill above Nouméa was in keeping with his position.

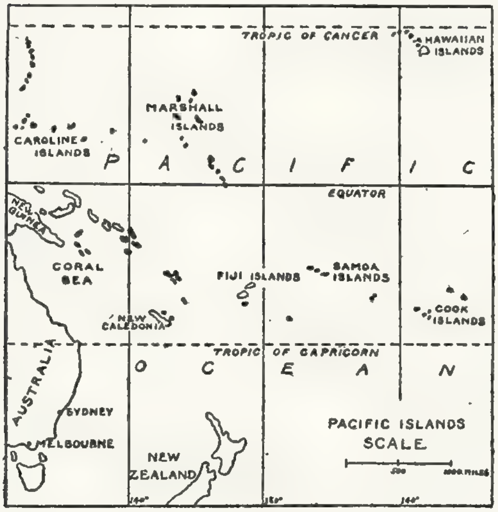
On the other hand Boulan was a trader, an insignificant dealer in copra and troca shell, whose reputation dwindled as his credit grew worse. He lost both his schooners, one off Tana, the other on the reef outside Vila. Few men knew that he beggared himself to reward the families of his crews. None cared. Thus it must always be among those who seek the right way—doing good by stealth, avoiding all outward show.

WHEN the road was started my master took me to Bourail, and put me in charge of a gang of laborers whose work was to chop down the trees and underbrush ahead of the main party. Our work was arduous and my master impressed me with my responsibility.

"Sakonji," he said to me, "I am giving you a man's task to do. If it is done well the country will profit by your work and I shall reward you."

I kept my peace for what could I say in answer to such idle talk?

Ho! It was hot in those hills. From Bourail they rose up, dun colored, to the sky. Here and there were gorges running back inland, gorges so narrow in places that the sun reached to the very bottom but for a little hour each day.



Every day or so Guichard and Boulan would ride out to where we worked and Guichard would give many orders in a loud voice which was meant to impress us. There were two natures in him striving for dominance. The benevolent councillor of Nouméa, all smiles and urbanity, and the maker of roads, hard, harsh, commanding.

Many times he cursed me before the men and would turn to Boulan exclaiming:

"What am I to do when I have to employ such fools? He would take the road from peak to peak if I did not check him. That is why we go so slowly."

Boulan was suffering from the heat and the delays were wearing him down.

"Then why don't you get a competent man to supervize the work?" he retorted. "Are there not several men now in Nouméa who have had the right kind of training?"

"Yes," answered Guichard, "but this Sakonji will improve and he can be trusted. That is why I put up with him."

Boulan bit his nails and said nothing for he knew Guichard as well as I. He knew that my master was paying me three francs a day and charging the Government the twelve francs he would have had to pay a foreman.

And there was another thing which at the time puzzled me. Guichard ever and again would tell me to cut towards some tree or rock and then later, when Boulan was present, he would abuse me for my stupidity and assert that he had pointed out some other landmark. *Hai mai!* And I never understood.

Month after month we worked, going ever higher. Behind us the road wound from valley bottom to hill top and down again, through swamps and forests, now skirting marshes, now hanging crazily to some precipitous hillside, until at last we entered the heart of the black men's country and our troubles began.

At this time I had ceased to command the cutters, for Boulan had been insistent, and I worked in the camp shared by Guichard and Boulan. This was at the entrance to Tihouen Pass, which runs mile after mile, twisting and turning between two great folds in the hills. The silence there wraps itself about one's soul, heavy and thick like a Kasmiri blanket. Not a breath of air reaches the bottom of the pass where a stream oozes and trickles in a bed of rushes and mud. Such must be the road to Hell according to Brahman teaching, only here the cliffs are not of iron but of rock matted with sweating green vegetation.

There were four tents in a clearing by the roadside and I supervised the issue of foodstuffs and materials to the various gangs.

But the black men were suspicious of the ribbon stretching up and up, eating through the groves and forests where their gods were said to live. And who knows where there may not be gods? They came down, these Kanakas as they are called, and spoke through their interpreters to Guichard.

They begged that the road be stopped and to propitiate Guichard they offered all they had in the shape of fruit and vegetables and pigs. These my master took and said:

"The road goes on. It is for your good. We bring you peace and money. Soon there will be work for every man and you shall grow rich."

And he gave the Kanakas rum to drink.

They went away singing but in the night they came out of the blackness, scores of them, and their spears ripped open the canvas tents. Such an event had been foreseen and all the white laborers had been provided with weapons. The attack was repulsed. We buried eleven Kanakas the next morning.

After the grave had been filled in Guichard struck me across the face because I had done nothing to save myself, but had sat awaiting what fate might befall, unwilling to join in the madness.

"What kind of man are you?" he shouted. "Do I pay you to sit idle when our lives are in danger?"

"Master," I replied when I had wiped the blood from my mouth, "is it more evil to steal than to slay?"

He looked at me, the color draining from his face, and I noticed how his nostrils quivered as he repressed his anger.

"You monkey," he said at last. "When next you speak like that I shall whip you until you shriek for mercy. Get back to your work."

But the red madness of the previous night had set my soul groping at last for the Right Way and I knew that my wanderings were nearly over.

Later in the day, therefore, having cleansed my heart of evil, I approached Guichard who lay sprawling beneath an awning smoking his pipe.

"Master," I said, "next week my contract comes to an end. It is time I returned to my home. My passage money——"

"Is forfeit." He smiled up into my face. "You have been insolent and disobedient, Sakonji. You shall not leave. Take the matter up with the *gendarmerie* if you wish."

Then he sucked at his pipe and squared his shoulders.

"When the road is finished I shall let you go. Will that suit you?"

"The road is far from completed," I answered. "I have heard it said it would take another four months. If that is so and I am forced to stay, by the laws governing such matters my services are forfeit for another full year."

He chuckled and blew a cloud of smoke. "What profound reasoning!" he said very softly. "And what are you going to do that you are in such a hurry to get back to your native kennel?"

The evil in my heart blazed up, but I replied evenly:

"I have paid the penalty of selfish desire. I shall make a pilgrimage to the holy places to set my heart at rest."

"Beggar!" he flung at me. "With a bowl and a mouthful of holy words. I know your kind. You are tired of work, so you would become a parasite. You are the stumbling block of all progress in the East. I do well to detain you."

I went back to my work and the road went forward. Time and again the Kanakas tried to turn us back; tribe after tribe broke and died at the gun mouths. They killed a few laborers it is true, but such were of no importance—what is a handful of laborers to the hungry gods of progress?

But Guichard sent word to Nouméa and a squad of soldiers came and camped next to us. These were men from another island called Tahiti, which is very far away indeed, and they killed out of jest and for sport.

It was hot in Tihouen Pass, hot and still. At dusk Boulan would walk up and down the stretch of road built that day and would grumble and curse at the ever increasing delays.

At last black patches began to appear on the hillside as we advanced. Boulan pointed them out to Guichard.

"Chrome!" he shouted excitedly. "We are nearly there now. Another fifteen kilometers. That's my land just beyond that peak, over there to the left."

BUT the delays grew more frequent. A whole stretch of road had to be carried up along the face of the cliff because Guichard thought the low ground too marshy. I heard them disputing about this at dinner time.

"Oh, why waste time?" pleaded Boulan. "Why waste time like this, Guichard? We don't need an avenue like the Champs Elysées to transport chrome."

"Perhaps not," Guichard answered lightly. "But this undertaking will be a credit to my department. If I followed your advice we should have to drain all the valley."

"Throw in fascines," urged Boulan. "That is cheaper than blasting the face of the cliff—and ten times quicker."

"I am in charge of the work, and I pretend to know my business. Have I not full power to take this road where I think best?"

I could hear Boulan's fingers drumming on the table top.

"If I cannot start work within two months I am ruined," he pleaded. "I shall have to renew my concession—and then I shall have no money to hire labor. Could you not be induced to work along the bottom?"

It seemed hours before Guichard answered:

"In my official capacity, of course, I could not entertain such a proposal, but between friends—" I saw his shadow move across the canvas as he leaned forward—"what is it you propose, my good Boulan?"

"Will you accept a third share in the profits? I can do no more."

Boulan's voice sounded like that of a hopeless, beaten man.

"Very kind of you," Guichard replied. "I shall see what can be done."

And the road was turned back into the valley the next day.

But I saw Boulan's sufferings increase from day to day. The work proceeded leisurely, without hurry, and the workmen laughed declaring that never had they had such a tolerant master. But some of them sneered and whispered that Guichard was not paying for the work and that he could afford to be tolerant.

Soon afterwards Guichard went to Nouméa and when he returned he brought with him a large map which he spread out before Boulan.

"As you see," he said, "we are now on the edge of my property, which runs from here to here."

He indicated points on the map.

"But, good ——!" exclaimed Boulan, wringing his hands. "It spreads right across Tihouen Pass—right across!"

"Just so." Guichard patted him playfully on the shoulder. "As you see the road must cross my land."

"Which I paid for," muttered Boulan, white and sweating with fear.

"That is immaterial. The deeds are in my name," chuckled Guichard. "Now, you will need a right of way."

"But I can not pay, I can not pay!" cried Boulan. "I have nothing. Barely enough to hire a dozen men for a month. Please, Guichard!"

Guichard rolled up the map and shook a finger at Boulan in mock anger.

"What a poor memory. Must I remind you? You said there were ten fortunes to be made here."

"But have I not already promised you a third of the profits?"

"My time is valuable. This ridiculous work is keeping me away from Nouméa."

Boulan gave way. He stormed and begged and entreated, but Guichard remained immovable.

"Do not forget," he added, "that I may stop the road wherever I like. Here, if I think fit, or in the center of my recently acquired land." He laughed softly. "Better be reasonable, my good Boulan."

The yellow light in Boulan's eyes played like lightning.

"Guichard," he said, "you know and I know what kind of man you are. I am now offering you one half the profits. This is my last word. You have abused——"

"Don't moralize," Guichard cut in. "In this age it is each man for himself. I do not want to stay many more years on this infernal island. I accept your offer—one half the profits."

We moved our camp forward several kilometers the next day. The pass at this point was narrow and tortuous. The walls were devoid of vegetation and the chrome appeared in black scars on the surface like some evil blight. The heat became appalling. We gasped for air and even Guichard spent most of his days on his cot. The stillness of that desolate spot haunts me still.

Then came the rains after intolerable days. Heat and rain, rain and heat. We suffocated. The ranks of the laborers were depleted by sickness; many of them died. Work came to a standstill and Boulan, half-crazed with fear, looked on helplessly.

Once more the Kanakas tried to stop the road and this time they drove their attack home. I saw them coming out of the fog, terrible men smeared with red ocher, brandishing clubs and spears. They smashed their way to the very center of the camp before the soldiers hemmed them in. Then they died, and Guichard, a smoking pistol in each hand, led the massacre. His face was set like a mask and such was his desire for vengeance that when the fighting was over he slew the wounded.

Soon afterwards Boulan found himself obliged to renew his right to the land and sent off a runner bearing the necessary documents and instructions.

"Poor old Boulan!" said Guichard as they watched the man hurry off down the pass. "What bad luck! Now you have the chrome and no means of working it."

Boulan turned to him, snarling.

"Whose fault is it? Yours. You have held up the work purposely. You ——. I would not believe what Mortier told me just before he died. Now I know that it was the truth."

Guichard shrugged and smiled faintly.

"You seem to have a woman's intuition. However, is it worth while spending more Government money building this road now that you are unable to exploit the property?"

Boulan's face was terrible to behold. It was drawn and haggard and there was misery in every line, but he answered:

"You won't stop here. You would lose your half interest and I do not think that that would be to your liking. I shall have to go to Nouméa. Perhaps I shall be able to raise some money."

"You won't get much money there," Guichard answered. "They know your position and, after all, this is a gamble."

"Did you say anything when you went back?"

"Oh, nothing much. Of course, I met people at the club, and as I saw no reason why we should be pestered by would-be prospectors I told them the land was not promising."

"You said that!" moaned Boulan. "You said that! Then what can I do? '

Guichard took him by the arm.

"Come and have an *apéritif*. It will ward off the fever."

In the tent, as I served the absinthe, he went on:

"If I finance your undertaking it seems to me that I deserve rather more of the proceeds than you have offered me. I have built you a road, I am ready to lend you the money without which you can do nothing, and yet you would retain half the profits although you only contribute the land. Come now, admit that it's very little."

"No!" shouted Boulan. "No, no, no."

"Think it over," Guichard said gently. "After all, I could stop work on the road at once and exploit my own ground."

Boulan pleaded in vain and at last surrendered. He made over his land to Guichard, gave him complete control and agreed to manage the mine, retaining as his share only a quarter of the eventual profits.

That night and all the next day he lay on his cot while the fever raged within him.

Hai mai! What an evil thing is the pursuit of outward things. Boulan's soul went down into the depths and he talked ceaselessly of the fortune he had lost, of his children, of his vanished dreams. Hour after hour he clutched at my hand as a drowning man clings to a spar, begging for help, crying for mercy, threatening vengeance. Again and again he talked of his helpless fear of Guichard and I understood that one thing alone would save him.

I put my free hand on his burning eyelids.

"Sleep," I said. "Sleep. Guichard shall trouble you no more."

He smiled and at last slept.

While he lay stricken a deputation of Kanakas again waited upon Guichard. Ahead of us, they said, was a sacred grove where they exposed their dead in the tree branches and they begged Guichard to spare this spot. But he was exasperated by the long-drawn warfare and blamed the natives.

"Nothing shall stop me," he told them. "Put your dead under the ground where they belong and do not come weeping to me about sacred trees."

"We can not hold our warriors," one of the Kanakas said.

"Then unleash them," retorted Guichard. "If they are longing to die send them against us. Now go. I have spoken."

They went and in the night we heard, faintly, the sound of their drums beating beyond the pass and we saw their fires burning on the hilltops.

Just before dusk the next day Boulan recovered consciousness and saw me kneeling by his side. Very slowly, painfully, his grip on my hand relaxed and he saw my fingers all white and shriveled from the pressure. He laughed weakly.

"You have been very kind, Sakonji," he murmured. "I am afraid I have no means of thanking you now."

"No need," I answered. "A man can only be measured by his service to others."

Guichard, coming in at the moment, chose to take offense at my words. He caught me by the shoulder and threw me to the ground outside the tent where all might see me.

"Keep your absurd advice to yourself," he called out, "and get back to your work."

Then he turned to Boulan, and I heard him grumble:

"That idiot is sulking because he thinks he should be released. I'll show him."

And all at once, while I lay on the ground and the laborers returning to their camp jeered at me, I realized that I still had a purpose to fulfil before I could properly gain the Right Way. Indifferent to my master's curses I bowed my head and went back to the tent where the stores were kept. There I sat on the ground in meditation, steeling my heart to accomplish my task.

TIME slipped by, night came, black and hushed until the rain, sweeping down the pass, drummed like thunder on the canvas walls.

Shortly before dawn just as the whistles blew in the camp there came a shot from the sentry at the eastern end of the valley, and abruptly the Kanakas came at us again. They rushed down the hillside smothering the sentries beneath them. They were met by volley after volley, but they came on, leaping through the low bushes, yelling frenziedly, and their sling stones began to whistle overhead.

Several of our people were hit; one man I saw pinned to earth by a spear through the shoulder, and the Kanakas swept on towards us. Guichard charged past my tent, calling out orders and I stepped to the door in time to see a score of black men hacking their way through our defenses.

The confusion, the noise echoing and reechoing in the narrow pass, the acrid smell of powder and cordite and the faint odor of blood and dust, all these blended together in the clearing dawn mist, in a picture I can not forget.

At last the Kanakas wavered, fell back out of striking range and the rifles crashed and crashed, mowing them down without mercy. Guichard led the soldiers forward at a run.

"Teach them a lesson. Hack them to pieces!" I heard him shout above the din.

Then a few minutes later I saw him come crawling back toward the empty camp. On hands and knees he dragged himself across the road, leaving a red streak behind him on the white surface. He signaled to me and I helped him to my tent. He had gone gray about the mouth and when he spoke his voice shook a little.

"The artery in my left leg," he said. "Tie something around it quickly. A spear——"

My time had come. I bent over him and saw the blood spurting bright red from the jagged wound.

"Quick," he ordered, "quick, Sakonji. I am too weak to tie it up myself."

I did nothing and the blood poured out onto the jute sack beneath him.

"I will release you tomorrow," he begged and there were tears in his eyes. "Be quick."

"No," I answered. "I shall neither help nor hinder. You have found joy in killing others, now your own life is at stake. Since I have been with you you have poisoned the lives of many people. Now you shall know which is best—to give or to take. Pray to your gods."

He tried to cry out, but he was too weak, he tried to crawl away and fell back whimpering. His face was ashen gray and the corners of his mouth twitched jerkily. I caught his whisper:

"Stop it, Sakonji. If you have any pity, stop——"

Then his face underwent a change, it became quite smooth as if ironed out and his whole body relaxed. He died, and I left him.

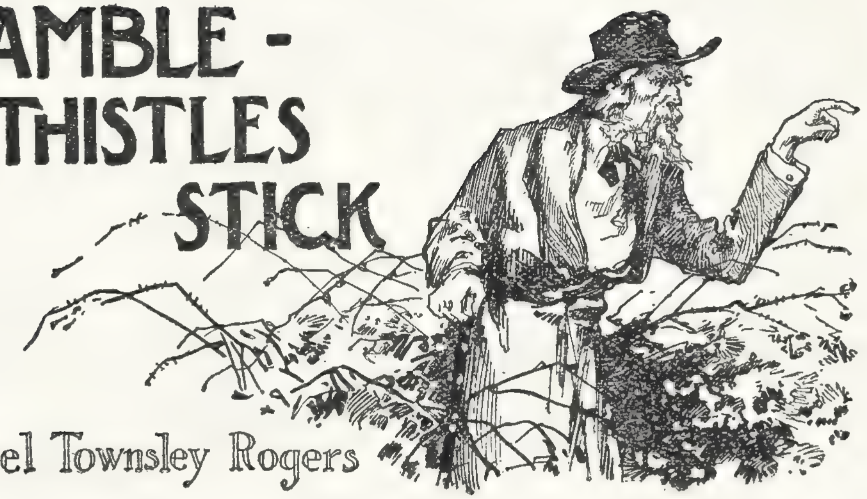
In his tent, just before the first of the fighters returned, I found certain papers signed by Boulan which I burned before shouting aloud that my master was dead.

Afterward I went to Boulan and surrendered myself, telling him fully what had happened. I had found the Right Way at last, making of myself a sacrifice that this alien might find happiness and I felt neither joy nor sorrow.

He sent me out of Tihouen Pass and I saw the sea again and breathed in the open. My master was dead and I was allowed to come home.

Since then I have seen many things but my feet have not strayed. As you see, there are no roads here, only tracks that would vanish overnight if the feet of men did not keep them open. But would it not be better to let the path vanish utterly than to lay its foundations on human lives as was done in Tihouen Pass?

BRAMBLE-THISTLES STICK



by Joel Townsley Rogers

“CLINGIN’ —— briahs!” Major Pettergrew cursed them.

He bent his sapless old backbone to pluck the furry, fuzzy little balls of green weed from the skirts of his frock coat and the edges of his spotless rebel-gray trousers. He cursed them several times, and largely, with braggart oaths, stalwart oaths, Southern oaths, oaths a whole universe larger and a creation older than the major himself.

“No otha place in the whole country, no, no’ in the whole State of Tennessee, I don’t reckon, wheah the briahs ah so mean and measly. This is a —— of a quee-ah place to be leading me into, jus’ fo’ the sake of a drink.”

But a good drink is worth its bulk in sweat. Old Major Pettergrew cursed and scrambled and kicked his way through the bramble-patch.

The man who walked with the major walked softly and lightly, with the tender footfalls of a cat; and his narrowed eyes swept continually about him. He paused, ominously staring at the major’s bent back, as the old man snatched furiously at the myriads of tiny thistles. They were hydra-heads, those green prickles, and two sprang out, or seemed to, for each one plucked off. The man who was with the major leaned threateningly above the major’s puckered head, half-closed his eyes, glancing through the cottonwood copse which stood on the edge of steep bluffs to the river. The late afternoon sun gilded the burnt-oak floods of the Mississippi. An amber screen was before the face of heaven.

There was no one within view, and no one within call. The man closed his eyes completely, smiling secretly to himself. It is a terrible thing when the soul takes thought of murder. Yet his eyes were hardened to beaten brass.

“Not yet!” His pressed lips formed the words. “Not yet—” But he made no sound.

And old Major Pettergrew was babbling and babbling on. “It’s been fo’ty yeahs, I don’t reckon, since I came out this way; and the briahs ah worse than evah. How come you to stow youah yalla moonshine likka ’way out heah? No one’d touch you if you set up a still on Main Street, fo’ you ah swo’n to uphold the law. And the best man to uphold the law, I don’t reckon, is the man who holds down his likka. The President of the United States, or even the Gov’nah of Tennessee, wouldn’t dast to touch you.

“Safe enough—suah. No one evah comes out *heah*, not even the rabbit-huntahs, not in day no’ night. We-all put the feah of God upon these lands, and I’d be afraid myself to walk through them alone. We-all put the feah of God upon these bramble-briahs. That was long ago.

“I’m warnin’ you that I’m goin’ fa’ther foh a drink of you’ likka this aftahnoon than I evah went fo’ man befoah. It had bettah be good likka.”

“Good enough,” said the man.

“These —— briahs!” yelled old Major Pettergrew in exasperated, unexpurgated monologue. "These —— *briahs! These* —— *briahs!* Theah's no otha place in the whole u'th, I don't reckon, wheah the briahs ah so consarn pestiferous. Get off, you! Get off!"

The major was in a fiery froth at the inanimate weeds. He tore at them with rabid oaths, slamming them to the ground. The man stood still, and laughed with yellow teeth.

"Get off! The —— Yanks sowed these heah. They belong to —— and the No'th."

One — two — three — forty-seven — forty-eight— Old Major Pettergrew's yellow claws snatched at the little weeds. Yet when he was through there were as many as at the beginning. The man who was with the major had lifted his eyes, had lifted his ears to catch each mute sound shrilling through the hushed wilderness of Summer. Sibilant was the faint stillness; the torrid air rocked and reeled. The sullen roar of the rolling Mississippi boomed mournfully through the hollow afternoon.

"These heah —— briahs ah like dreams of old, bad things we done when we was young. You nevah can get rid of those dreams, no mattah how hahd you try. They come in the night.'

Slowly they pushed, the major and the man, out of the bright bramble-field and into the dismal shades of the thick cottonwoods. Even here there were the briars, standing with little bayonets in serried masses at the bases of the cottonwoods. They reached to the thighs of the major. They clung with fatal fingers to his knees. Yes, they profaned with tiny tears the immaculacy of his pressed gray pants.

"Fo'ty yeahs since last I came this way," sputtered old Major Pettergrew.

The man made no speech. His silence was oppressive as the heat, dark as the amber day.

"Fo'ty yeahs, and I reckon theah's no othah man but you'd dast come out this way, I don't reckon. Yes, suh, I'm c'tainly su'prized. I reckon ever' man heah abouts is afraid of this black spot, I don't reckon. It was heah the old fo't stood—old Fo't Pillow. The blue-bellies took it from us in sixty-two, and we took it back again in sixty-foah. Took it back, men and mules and niggers and guns. —— —— briahs!"

And again the major fell to curses. He steadied his shaking old frame with a hand on the mossy trunk of a white cottonwood, picking everlastingly at the tenacious briars. As well might he have tried to pluck away the mortal years which clung to the sinews of his joints.

"This is the last time I'll come this way, fo' you, o' ——, o' all the yalla likka in Tennessee."

The man smiled leanly. His eyes bent down. As the claws of a cat at play his fingers had begun to curl—as the claws of a cat at its prey. There was a green fire, like the hot, cold fire of emeralds, in his eyes. Slowly his lids drooped down, curtaining grewsomely that emerald flame. Between his lips his set teeth shone whitely, but there was no other light at all on his face. Ah, it is a terrible thing to think of murder, even when a man is mad!

"Old Fo't Pillow," said the major musingly. "Fo'ty — fifty — fifty-seven yeahs it's been since fu'st I came this way. See those mounds beyond the cottonwoods? That's wheah we came ovah, givin' the rebel yell. Fo' we we'h Fo'est's men, and theah wasn't nothing made to stop us, I don't reckon. Lo'd, Lo'd! It makes me feel young again to think of it. Theah was a battalion of darkies heah to hold the fo't, a'med to shoot down white men, and with a renegade Yank in command. We took the fo't—no quarteh! No quarteh did we give that day. We dumped them in the trenches they had dug, black and white, dyin' and dead, and spaded the u'th on top to let them ripen till the Judgment Day."

Shrill was the old major's cracked old voice as the memory of dusty battles tweaked it to a scream. In this one second he lived, in the memory of youth, the dream of battles long spent, the heat of blood within his heart, of blood upon his hands. For the rest, flesh and soul, the bramble-briars about his knees were greater stuff than he. He was nothing—a squeaky ghost.

The man in the somber shades of the cottonwoods gave no heed to the old doting major. The babblings of withered fools—they may be heard in any corner of the world; and great among fools are those who tell of old wars long dead. The crooked fingers of the man had now curled up into leopard-like claws.

Hot and tense the air of the Summer pressed down on the bluffs by the river. There was no silver breeze. The man gasped with regular breathing. The air seemed to scorch his lungs. Sonorously tumbled down the vast floods of the whelming Mississippi, with a constancy of thunder like to the rolling of the spheres.

"Black no' white, not one of them got away, I don't reckon. Theah was one little fellow, not mo' than nine no' ten, who ran to me and tried to hide behind me. I felt sorry for the little fellow—his face was so white, and he had a limp. But I sent him the way o' the rest of them fo' all he whimpe'd and squawled and dragged himself along on the ground to my feet. For that is wa'—it is terrible, but it is wa'. He was the son of some white blackgua'd who had been fighting side by side with the niggers. Best kill the little rattleh befo' his fangs have sucked up poison.

"It was a day to remembah. It was heah—heah. You wouldn't think it now, would you, to see that so't of quiet haze rising up from A'kansaw, and how peaceful ever' thing looks? Don't seem like theah had been no blood spilt heah abouts, I don't reckon. Well, it was a day. We all took to hohse and away from heah on sweatin' leatheh, fo' a gunboat down in the rivah was pounding us thick and fast, and we'd ha' all swung from the cottonwoods if the Yanks had caught us heah. These —— *briahs!*"

No one within view, and no one within call. No one within call, though a strangled scream should rise to drown out the lumbering Mississippi. The man with the major looked right and left. His shoulders were stirred by a breeze, a hot breeze, an internal wind of fire. They began to sway cattishly sidewise, with a terrible feral motion.

Cottonwood-scrub and bramble-patch hid them from all the world—the two, alone within the shadows of the dismal darkness. The shadows were dark within this copse though, without, it was yet high day. The Mississippi, as it gleamed past the foot of the steep bluffs, was vacant save for the golden glamour of the sun and for those dead floating things which give the waters life. It was not a wind which stirred the cottonwoods; it was not a breeze. Perhaps it was a breath, a thing intangible, but horribly like a reptile. The major wiped his forehead.

From far away below them blew up the eery note of a factory whistle, dolorously shrill, inhumanly frail. And a long wail replied up the river. The smoke of a boat was blowing down.

"Five o'clock," yammered the old major, gawping about him as his memory took the leap forward through fifty-seven years. "Five o'clock, and theah's the *Mobile Bay*. Wheah's that yalla moonshine likka? Heah you've dragged me out all this aftahnoon, and got me baked to a cindah. Wheah's that drink?"

The man hesitated. His eyes were fixed, and a peculiar glassiness came over them. It was as if the very balls of white exuded a cold sweat. To do it——!

"What ah you doin' with me—making a fool o' me? You ——"

"Here! A drink of life immortal!"

The man was gagging some such words. His talons were in the neck of the old major. From out that leathery throat came one popping cry of horror. That was all.

Relentless as death—hot as a hearth—the fingers pressed. Ah, it was a nasty thing! The man drew back his lips from his teeth, and a thin bloody sigh came forth. Threshing back and forth, the man wrung the neck of the old major. The brambles reached and tore at his knees. The tallest snarled their claws in his face. No word—the old man fought hard for the crumbs of his life. Those four feet beat a terrible threshing dust from the weedy floor of earth.

The old man let his hands fall. His eyes were wide, were questioning as those of a child. Slowly his head fell aside. And yet his eyes were wide with half a smile, for he looked upon the Silence.

Yes—ha! His arms dangled like those of a wooden monkey whose poor pin joints are broken. They seemed to tinkle in the windless air. On the gleaming amber of mighty Mississippi his ogling eyes stared fixedly frog-wise. They were bursting, filled to bursting, with the large sight of death.

The Mississippi thundered with a sudden roar. From the depths of gray-green leaves aloft a scarlet tanager, brief adventurer from sweet lethal tropics, let loose one bar of muted music.

The man wiped his hands. A sprung bramble-briar, snapping upright again, lashed at the knees of the man. He jumped. In the depths of the briar-path the eyes of the dead were staring. The man gagged for breath. Murder! His soul forsook him.

Horror—horror! He gave a loud cry, and, turning, ran madly from that fearful place. Still the Mississippi was calling, and the tanager merrily trilling. Still the tanager was whistling, and the bramble-thistles below those panicky feet reached up with prickly snares. They caught the ankles of the man—they wound themselves about his loins. He tripped and fell face down in a patch of the spiny weeds.

At once he was up and on. Far away the tanager was whistling.

GENE CASPAR, sheriff of the county, came limping into his office at seven of that bright Summer evening. A slight man was Caspar, lean and sparsely fleshed. A scar at the corner of his mouth drew it back in a perpetual grimace; yet when you looked at him you might see that he was not laughing, or, laughing, but without bitterness. He was gray on the outside of his head, and reputed to be as gray within. In other words, no man's fool, not even his own.

A big man was waiting for him in his office; a fat man, with Summer fat; a neat man, in Summer silks and flaming crimson tie. His collar was clean and fresh, though spheres of sweat dribbled down the runnels of his chin and cheeks.

"Hello, Mark Pettergrew," said Caspar, staring at the big man curiously. "Want to see me?"

"Nothing particular," said Mark Pettergrew. "Just dropped in for a chat."

Gene Caspar stared, again with obvious curiosity. Young lawyer Pettergrew and Sheriff Caspar were not on the best of terms.

"Hope you haven't been waiting too long, Mr. Pettergrew."

"Only since about four," yawned Mark. "Three hours."

"I was in here then—didn't leave my office till four-thirty."

"Maybe it was four-thirty when I came in, then," amended Mark. "Don't make much difference—a half-hour—in the law. Ho—hum! Wish you'd keep some magazines, sheriff."

"Didn't expect to see you here, Mr. Pettergrew. Sorry to have kept you waiting. I met Ed Manners on the street, and we got to talking 'way beyond my office hours. What can I do for you?"

"What can you do me for?" asked Mark Pettergrew, laughing loudly. "Why, nothing, I don't reckon. I dropped in to see you, and am just too fat 'n' lazy to move. What'd Doc Manners have to say about me?"

"Nothing that I can remember."

"I was scheduled to put a ring on the finger of Daisy Manners, you know."

"Is that off?"

"The old major, my uncle, came between. Said the Mannerses weren't good enough for the Pettergrews. They was some hot words passsed between doc and the old boy. For me, I'm just as well-satisfied. Daisy's taken a shine to a drummer fellow from Saint Lus."

"I see you're wearing the same famous crimson tie, Mr. Pettergrew," said old Caspar, staring at Mark's dress with admiring eyes. Very crisp and laundered Mark Pettergrew looked. "You certainly take a powerful lot of time to make yourself look pretty. Who's your barber?"

"Who's my what?"

"Your barber. I couldn't get my cheeks to look that smooth, not with Messrs. Gillette, Durham, and Ever-Ready to do the job for me."

Mark rubbed his hand vaguely over his shiny fat jowls. His eyes were vacuous, as he was not entirely certain whether old Caspar was laughing at him or not. That grin was cynical and sour.

"Oh, I'm not in mourning," said young Pettergrew after a pause, "not for Daisy Manners, nor nobody."

"Let me straighten your pretty tie for you, Mr. Pettergrew. There—you look now like your uncle's own sweet little boy."

"What the ——'s the idea?"

"Set still. No idea 'tall. I'm so rough and ready myself, and full of alfalfa liquor, that I like to see a young fellow looking dainty. How's your uncle, the old major?"

"Oh, he's always well, I don't reckon."

"Expect to come into some property when he kicks off, eh?"

"No telling."

"Well," suggested Gene Caspar frankly, "he's a tough old rooster, and he's liable to live many a day yet. I wouldn't count my chickens."

"Count the chickens from a rooster—ha, ha, ha!"

THE red evening was sinking downward, and the shrill locusts began to strum their frail violins. The shadow of night had fallen on the world like rain when Sheriff Caspar came limping home. Blackbirds rustled and shrieked with shouting, tuneless song.

"Seven-thirty, *Eu*-gene Caspar! Daisy Manners has come over for supper, and the biscuits have been in and out of the oven eight times, and the gravy is ruined, and the potatoes are all crumpled to little bits! Oh dear, oh dear!"

"Hello, Daisy," said old Caspar, ducking from the glummering laments of his wife.

Caspar had lived past forty years in this world of noise, and he knew that a woman is not happy unless she has a burned potato to shriek about. Not that Mrs. Caspar was at all a shrew. She was a very pleasant woman, and quite average.

"Looking real sweet this evening, Daisy. I saw your pop this afternoon."

"I guess you see him more than I do. He's over here except when he's making professional calls or asleep. I never saw the beat of you two men. I don't see how Mrs. Caspar stands it."

"We just set up a smoke-barrage with our pipes, and she doesn't dare to say anything. A man learns how to handle a woman after forty years of it."

The conversation was interrupted while old Caspar said grace over the ruined supper. This shows that he was both very old and very old-fashioned. The young know that food does not come from God, but from restaurants; and the new-fashioned trust that He can hear them silently.

"Pooh!" Daisy Manners bubbled, so soon after the amen that it brought a frown to the face of Mrs. Caspar. "You men may learn in forty years how to handle a woman, but we know from the beginning how to handle you."

Gene Caspar smiled. He had his doubts.

"Are you thinking of some one you know how to handle, Daisy?"

"Don't talk to me of Mark Pettergrew!"

"So, everything's ended there?"

"Is it? I never cared a snap of my fingers for him. I wouldn't even have looked at him or spoken to him. And then when his horrible old uncle heard that we were going together, he made Mark break the engagement——"

"There was an engagement?"

"I hate him! I loathe him! I despise him! I can't bear him! The oily, grinning, fat fool! I gave him back his ring, you can believe me, when I heard that old Pettergrew said that the Mannerses aren't good enough for him. Him! What's a Pettergrew? There's a real nice young man——"

Daisy caught her tongue, and was silent.

Caspar winked broadly across the table at his wife.

"There's always a better one where they come from," he asserted. "Mrs. Caspar took me after she had thrown down two, and for the last forty years she's been wishing she had waited one or two more."

"*Eu*-gene!"

"I can't bear Mark Pettergrew," insisted Daisy Manners with more violence than the heat of the day demanded. "He met me today on Main Street just as I was passing by his office—great, hulking lout; all he's good for is to be a lawyer and sit in his office with his feet on a desk. He was all so very sweet in his gray flannels and bright red tie, and with a little white rosebud in his buttonhole. He tried to stop me and talked to me ten minutes about not minding what old Major Pettergrew said. But I wouldn't listen to him."

"Wouldn't listen to him?"

"No, sir. Indeed, I wouldn't listen to one word that came out of his mouth. He said that maybe the old major would die pretty soon, and then he'd come back to me. Perhaps he expected me to thank him. Me, to take him when he pleased, and where he pleased, and why he pleased! I didn't listen to a single word. There he stood, so sweet in his shiny shoes and brushed clothes, and with that little rose in his lapel, laughing at me! I saw that he saw I wasn't listening to a word he said, or even looking at him. I hardly knew even that he existed. Then at the very same time that he was talking to me, holding to my arm and trying to whisper in my ear, Myrtle Perry passed by, and he winked at her over my shoulder. I slapped him, and went away."

"That's the right way to handle a man," said Caspar seriously.

"He's not worth even looking at! I turned around, and there he was grinning after me."

Old Caspar felt in his pocket for a bit of pipe. The meal was ended, having come to a whelming climax with gooseberry pie and cheese. "That fellow's not worth you, Daisy," he said, as he crammed the pipe bowl with shredded plug tobacco. "He's a lazy loafer, only living till his uncle dies and leaves him a couple of hundred thousand. He's not even supporting himself by the law."

"I should say not. Not the way he dresses. He spends more on clothes in a month than I'd spend in a year."

"But you're only a girl," said Gene Caspar with a twinkle.

The exception was well taken: Southern girls aren't supposed to spend so much as men to adorn themselves. It may be because they don't need to.

"Mark Pettergrew is our prime example of a slick dresser, I'll say it. He was in white shoes and sweet silk clothes when I saw him this evening——"

"A man changing his clothes in the daytime! Isn't that awful?"

"He's always wearing that same bright tie, though, you notice. I don't guess you can help it. It sets off his moonshine nose. No, I wouldn't think about Mark Pettergrew. He'll never have money enough to get married until the old man dies."

"I'm *not* thinking about him. I haven't given him a thought for weeks. I don't know how you happened to mention him, I'm sure, Mr. Caspar. There's no one in the whole world, not one, further from my mind than Mark Pettergrew."

DAISY left at ten. Old Caspar and his wife sat on their honeysuckle-veiled front porch, rocking endlessly as the moon rocked in the sky. Faintly there was the far cry of the murmuring Mississippi, and a steamboat's howling siren blowing up from sable distances.

Mrs. Caspar's head had fallen to the shoulder of Gene. She awakened with a faint gasp, stretching her numbed limbs and straightening the cramps from her fingers.

"You with your pipe," she murmured sleepily, "can stay out here and fool the fireflies. I'm going to bed like a Christian woman."

A half-hour old Gene Caspar sat in the golden darkness, rocking squeakingly in a ceaseless monotone. One foot tapped the floor relentlessly; the other, the lame leg, was doubled beneath him. Night brought it pain. His nostrils were filled with the intoxicating incense of the honeysuckle. A black moth fluttered down from the sky, a very ash of the invisible night made tangible, and seemed to catch his heart on its black, burnt wings.

Evening is the sweetest hour for those whose blood is old. Youth cries out, being fierce of heart, for the red hours of the tragic day.

Caspar crammed his clay pipe again, shredding the tobacco with a rolling motion of his palms. Curling smoke-wreaths rose. They drowsed his senses. He did not see the gate to his little lawn open, nor the man who stepped up to the porch. The visitor bent over Gene Caspar's drowsing head, touching him lightly on the shoulder.

"Asleep at the switch, Gene Caspar!"

Caspar opened his eyes calmly. Perhaps he had not been asleep, but covertly watching.

"Hello, Ed Manners. I was sort of dozing off, thinking of you."

Manners felt around till his blind fingers had closed on a chair in the darkness of the porch. He fell into it, taking the tobacco-plug offered him, and cutting off a few slivers for his pipe.

"Where's my little girl, Gene? Is she and your wife inside?"

Gene Caspar sat upright, looking strangely at his friend.

"She left here more'n an hour ago."

"There was a fellow from Saint Lus—a drummer," said Doctor Manners, starting up. "You don't reckon——"

"Nothing's happened to her, Ed. Hold your horses. She don't love any fellow from Saint Lús; she loves Mark Pettergrew. How'd I know? She told me she hates him, that's why."

"Well, there's nothing to be feared from Mark Pettergrew. He's no good; but he's not good enough to be bad."

"I'm not so sure. He comes from a stinking breed," said old Caspar.

"You don't like the old major?"

"There was a time I didn't like him," said Gene Caspar shortly. "I don't know whether I'd say the same thing now or not. He's an old man, is the major, and I'm getting old myself—past sixty-five. Time enough to forget the men we don't like, and to think only of those we like."

"It's not so bad getting old," suggested Doctor Manners lazily, stretching his legs with a huge yawn. "I can't say that I like the major myself, after what he has said about me and Daisy. But the major's score with me is done. I owe him nothing, not even a nasty thought."

Again Gene Caspar stared a little curiously at his friend.

"It's a good thing when a man can forget his enemies, Ed. There's more fun in sitting in the darkness here, smoking and thinking and talking a little, than there is in thrashing and wrastling around just to plague men we've hated. There was once a time that for thirty years I hated a man, and bode my chance to kill him. What of it? Every man has had his hatreds, just as he has had his loves, and in the hating and the loving there's both strength and sorrow. Strength, and sorrow, and the sweet of life."

A firefly slashed across the night like a falling star. The pipe-bowls of the two men smoked and steamed.

"I get enough to fill my brain out of just being here and smelling that honeysuckle, without worrying about men I ought to hate, Gene."

"That's the only way, Ed. You never knew it, but for thirty years, from the time I was a little tiny kid till I had gray in my beard, I hated a man. I didn't hate him like I might a wolf, and be afraid of him, but like I would hate a snake, wanting to kill him. Whole days I used to be so burning up with thoughts of revenge that I would shake like I had the fever. I planned a hundred ways to kill that fellow, or worse.

"The years went by, because I wanted to get him proper, and I figured the longer he lived, the worse it would be for him when I got him. There was plenty of time. The man never knew me—would walk up and down the street with me as brave as you please—was willing to take my liquor. And I could have reached out my hands many a time and cracked his lean old neck."

"I might think you were talking of Major Pettergrew, Gene."

"What makes you think that? Thirty years is a long time. First thing I knew, I found that the man I had hated wasn't there any more. No, he didn't die, but he had grown so old and foolish he was worse than dead. He'd lost most of his teeth. I don't care what you say, Ed, you can't go on hating a man without any teeth. Oh, I still hated, but it wasn't he I hated any longer. I just hated. Realizing that, and feeling that I was getting a little rheumatism in my joints, I took a good drink for the rheumatism and the hate, and killed them both."

Old Caspar yawned. Through the darkness he bent his shrewd old eyes again on Ed Manners.

"Why do you tell me this now?" asked Doctor Manners.

"No reason at all, except that I just got to thinking how much better it is to be this way, calm and lazy-like, and feeling your muscles squeak when you try to move your arms, than to be everlastingly eating your heart out for a dead love or a dead hate. The dead don't do the living any good. I know you well enough, Ed, to know that if old Pettergrew, we'll say for instance, ever cut you with the nastiest words on his old whip tongue, you wouldn't aim to try to get revenge from him."

"What's the use?"

"That's what I say, Ed."

A silence fell upon them again. Old Caspar began to creak back and forth once more in his chair, tapping his foot with slow reiteration. Ed Manners sank farther down into the receptive bulk of the darkness. Like smoldering glow-worms their tobacco glowed—now molten, seething red, now ashy yellow as they sucked the smoke. The moon—it was a mighty moon, a burnished, brazen moon—was above the pine-tops, staring unwaveringly toward the Mississippi.

"Well—" began Doctor Manners, yawning and lifting himself from his chair. "Ed, did you ever hear of the Fort Pillow massacre?"

Gene Caspar had his eyes closed as he asked the sudden question, or seemed to have them closed. Yet no doubt through those narrowed lids he was staring as well as the blackness permitted at his old friend. For a second he stopped his rocking; but now again in the darkness of the vine-clad porch it groaningly went on.

Reflectively Doctor Manners tapped his pipe into the hollow of his hand. Some sodden lees yet lingered in the bowl—live coals which sizzled in his hand and must have burned him. With a sudden gesture he scattered them through the honeysuckle vines, as the demiurge might scatter abroad from his palm molten suns to sparkle in dark starry spaces.

He had filled his pipe again, had applied the match with eyes cocked slantwise, carefully judging the flame, had taken a volcanic puff, before he replied to the question.

"Reckon I have heard of it, Gene. Who hasn't, hereabouts? It was before my time, and almost too long ago for you to remember, I'd think. What brought that to your mind?"

"Talking of old times. You know the fort stood pretty near here, in a tangle of cottonwood-scrubs atop of the bluffs by the river. You know—the niggers call it Old Hell. A right nasty piece of ground, filled with snakes and the dirtiest little bramble-weeds like I never saw——"

"I never was there," said Ed Manners. "I ain't afraid of ghosts, but——"

He waved his pipe expressively.

"No one goes around there now, Ed. There used to be meetings of the White Camelia up there after the war, and that is reason enough for all the coons to say it's haunted land. Nasty ground, and sown to dark and bloody salt."

"Sort of long ago, these things, Gene. My old man was with Lee in Virginia 'most all of the war."

"My old man and his three brothers fell right here in Tennessee, one after the other in battles up and down the river, till not one of them was left. They all wore the blue. Bloody days, and about as fiercely fought on one side as the other, I guess. The gray-backs had more reason than the blue-bellies, though, since they were fighting for their own.

"But this Fort Pillow thing was without excuse. It was the worst thing that happened. Not even Kansas nor Missouri, where brothers were knifing each other in the dark, could find its match. A half-ragged mob of hill-billies came tearing down with Forrest. They must have been filled with corn-brandy and general deviltry to begin with, and when they saw some freedmen guarding the fort, they went shooting crazy. They went knifing crazy.

"There were only about three hundred men to man the earthworks, and God knows how many of *them* there were. It must have been five to one, and it looked like fifty. They came swarming over with the rebel yell, and with some other word that no one understood till they began their work. It was 'no quarter' they had been yelling.

"There wasn't any. They were mad dogs that day. The Yanks threw down their guns, some of them trying to run, and the rest trying to surrender. Every last living creature went down, even the dogs, before one of them had time to tumble down the bluffs to the river, where a poor little pop-gun boat was spattering away. Out of the whole herd of that butchered garrison just one soul escaped."

"It is war," said Doctor Manners sadly.

"War with the knife. You might not have heard that even one escaped, Ed. He was a little fellow, son of one of the white Yanks. A Johnny cut him down to earth—thought he was dead—tumbled him into a pit with the coons. But he wasn't dead, and he crawled out of that living grave in the night when Forrest's men had gone. The boy fell down the bluffs to the river, thinking the gray-backs were still there, and swam away, dragging a smashed leg through the water after him.

"Something to remember, that night! He left his old man at the fort, piled up with a heap of the blacks. A little fellow he was, seven years old, and with a broken ankle—no place to go, and his old man dead."

Gene Caspar's clay pipe sizzled out. It was gray and tasteless to his mouth, but still he sucked at it. Reiteratively, like the cane of a blind man, his rocking foot tapped the boards of the porch. Manners had fallen once more into the deeps of his chair.

"Major Pettergrew was with Forrest that day. I have heard him tell it," said the doctor.

"It seems strange now, doesn't it? A toothless old sot he is today, with no more strength to him than to a blind worm, and no more blood than a toad. He's only a dry twig, yet in his time there was blood in him. Men heard his voice. Men died because of him. There were plenty of men who would have given their lives to have killed him. Better for him, perhaps, if one of them had, since time has taken revenge enough on him now."

"He has lived peacefully," said Ed Manners, "and he has grown rich. Plenty of men are willing to envy him. Yet I don't—not I."

"Give me a light, Ed."

"Here you are, Gene. Don't let your hand shake so. You make me feel old. This is the best thing of the old wars, Gene. We can shake hands on them, and all the bitterness of them is done."

"Here's my hand, Ed."

"A good, friendly hand, Gene. I might tell you I am surprized to hear that there was one survivor from that Fort Pillow affair. It is fortunate the little fellow, if he lived——"

"I haven't heard as to that."

"Perhaps he didn't. But if he did, it was wise he had no thought of revenge on Major Pettergrew, or any of the others that day. The major has grown to be an old man, past the four score, and his years are heavy on him."

"Perhaps," said Gene Caspar after a long pause, "perhaps the boy did have thoughts of revenge. But the heat of such things is gone."

"What made you think of all of this, Gene?"

"The moonlight on the Mississippi, I guess, Ed. It is like *that* night. I never saw it so red this time of year."

Ed Manners got up for a second time.

"I'm going to locate that little lost girl of mine," he said. "Daisy's all right—but you know what girls are these days, even our girls of the South. So you don't think there is anything in that fellow from Saint Lus?"

"Mark Pettergrew," said old Caspar.

Ed Manners puttered at his pipe.

"My lights gone out now—no match," he said, feeling about in his pockets. "Lend a hand, Gene."

Gene Caspar struck a light, holding it up as Manners bent above him. The flame was frail. The heat of the Summer evening seemed too oppressive for even fire to live. Ed Manners grasped Caspar's wrist at the sleeve to steady his hand.

"Thanks. Say, what's this? You had a burr on your sleeves, Gene."

Gene Caspar took the little green ball and threw it out into the honeysuckle vines.

Long after Ed Manners left him the sheriff sat on his little porch. The squeak of his chair was a perpetual drowsy pendulum, droning out the little seconds with a voice immitigable, yet frail. A drowsy bee had tangled amidst the honeysuckle. It grumbled elfin oaths within its beard.

Loud, there was the owlish hoot of a steamboat on the Mississippi, as it swept with wary lights around shoal and bend. It was the peace of God which falls in Summer evenings, sweet with the holy incense of tobacco. An old man's dreams. Old Gene Caspar was uneasy. The night was too calm.

"There is something nasty abroad," he thought with hardening eyes.

The gate had opened again. He recognized Daisy Manners running up the walk even before she had stepped on to the porch.

"Well, Daisy, forget something? Your pop was here looking for you. Are you figuring to run off with that young drummer from Saint Lus?"

"Listen, Mr. Caspar. As I was leaving your house, I walked down Main Street in front of Mark Pettergrew's offices—just to sort of cool off, the evening is so hot. I saw Mark. He wants me to run away with him."

"Not caring what his uncle thinks of it?"

"He says he wants me. I don't know what to say. Father wouldn't speak to him now, not after what the major said about the Mannerses. I thought—I thought I'd ask you, or Mrs. Caspar."

"Ask us what, Daisy?"

"What I should—" The girl stammered.

Old Caspar was looking at her with amusement.

"Thought you hated the very sight of him," he suggested dryly. Then he straightened his face. "I tell you what you do, Daisy. You run off home and go to sleep. Mark Pettergrew was joking you. He hasn't got enough money for a marraige license, and he wouldn't run off with all the girls in the world if the old major was set against it. He knows on which side his bread is buttered."

"He said he loved me," said Daisy, twisting her fingers.

"Likely enough he does. That is reasonable."

"I told him I was going to ask your advice. He's waiting. I don't know what to say."

"Go home to your pop," repeated old Caspar firmly. "I wouldn't trust Mark Pettergrew with a daughter of mine, no, nor with my money."

As the girl still hesitated, evidently not finding this the kind of advice she had expected from the easy-going Gene Caspar, the old sheriff put on his official face and took her by the arm.

"You don't want me to advise you to do any such thing, Daisy, as to run off with Mark Pettergrew. You don't want to support him, and his law business can't afford to support you. Anyway, you hate him."

"Who said I did!"

"A little bird whispered it. Come home with your Uncle Gene, Daisy."

Old Caspar slipped her hand through his arm, leading her down the street and around the corner to the Manners house.

"Here's your little girl, Ed," he said. "Don't you worry about her. She's all right."

"I wasn't worrying, Gene."

THE sheriff had returned home and was preparing to enter indoors to the torrid sleep of mid-Summer, when he heard a loud pattering of feet down the street.

"Sounds like a fire," he thought.

The running steps came to a stop before his gate, and Caspar could make out the large bulk of Mark Pettergrew shaking its wooden bars.

"Sheriff Caspar! Caspar!"

"I'm here, up on the porch. Find the latch—it's just beneath your fingers. Come on up.

"What does he want?" the sheriff thought. "Is he going to say something about Daisy Manners, or ——"

Mark found the gate latch at last. He swung the gate wide and stumbled up the walk. His white silk suit was monstrous in the night; his crimson tie seemed black.

"Hello, hello. I'm here, Mr. Pettergrew. Take a chair. What's happened?"

Mark Pettergrew reached out his hands and clasped the weazened arms of the old sheriff. He shook the old man like a puppy, seemingly unconscious of his strength.

"Mr. Caspar, for the love of God! My Uncle Jefferson—Major Pettergrew—found murdered out in the cottonwoods——"

"How is that?"

"The major—the poor old major—choked to death! Wait. Wait a moment till I get my breath. I've been running."

"It seems funny to see you excited, Mark Pettergrew," was the only thing the sheriff said. He added to that, when Mark gasped for words—

"Did you leave him out there?"

"Leave him out there! Just heard of it—out in the bramble thickets by Fort Pillow—no one much goes that way. You couldn't get *me* to go for a million dollars. Who could have done it, sheriff? Who could have?"

Gene Caspar seemed unconcerned. He reached up a hand and laid it on Mark Pettergrew's white shoulder.

"Let me straighten your tie, son. And your hair needs brushing. Don't get excited about it. It spoils your good looks."

Young Pettergrew was still shaking old Caspar in his unwonted excitement. Caspar was smiling his crooked smile as he peered strangely through the night at this bearer of evil tidings. As Mark continued to shake him, old Gene slipped from his convulsive clutch, and cupped his hand inadvertently, yet significantly, about Mark Pettergrew's neck. That hand was strong; the younger man could feel it bite through the folds of fat at his larynx.

"Not that way! That was the way that *he*——"

Mark shrank from that unpleasant hold with a visible tremor. Old Caspar was still smiling.

"Choked to death, was he? A woman couldn't have done that."

"A woman!"

"Well, he didn't say very nice things about Daisy Manners. Where did you learn this, Mark? How did you happen to find him—how was he killed—who did it?"

Caspar's questions were barked out so quickly that a more astute mind than that of Pettergrew would have had difficulty in answering them. The big man could only wave his hands about.

"If I knew who did it," he managed to say at last, "do you think I'd be here telling you about it? I'd be getting my gun and a rope. I'd—I'd rend his gullet!"

"It was only this morning I saw the old major," said Caspar thoughtfully, "and passed the time of day with him. Why do you know about this? Sure no one's been stringing you? Tell me!"

Mark Pettergrew was groping for words.

"Jack Jackson told me. You know Jack Jackson? He comes from up in the hill-country."

"No," said Caspar placidly. "Never heard of Jack Jackson. But that doesn't matter. Take your time, Mark, and tell me all you know. Did this John Johnson do it?"

There was no question but that Mark Pettergrew was terrified. He cast his glance nervously over his shoulder. Death runs so in clans among the hill-people that the sons and heirs of murdered men had best beware.

"You know we were talking in your office this evening, and we happened to mention that Ed Manners had had hard words with Uncle Jefferson."

"Threats are not murder," said old Caspar. "If they were, there's not a man walking who oughtn't to be hanged. Tell me what you *know*."

"When I came home from your office this evening, I found this fellow——"

"John Johnson?"

"I found him waiting on the porch to see me. He comes down from the hills now and again with some of his corn moonshine, and now and then Uncle Jefferson or I buy it. John Johnson knows the major pretty well. You know the big field of bramble-patch and the cottonwoods by the bluffs on the river? John Johnson was out hunting there this afternoon——"

"That is a queer place to hunt," said Gene Caspar.

"Hunting quail or rabbits," said Mark Pettergrew, gradually controlling himself with splendid power of the will. "This fellow——"

"Jack Jackson?"

"Yes. He wanted to go where no one would catch him, being as it is the closed season. There's no one hereabouts that I know of, who would go near that ——place, black man nor white, brave nor cowardly."

"Oh, I don't know," denied Caspar easily. "I wouldn't be afraid of the place myself. And you say that this Jack Jackson——"

"He was stumbling around in the midst of the bramble-patch with his gun on the crook of his arm, looking around for rabbits. He stared down at his feet, and there he had almost stepped on the poor old major—dead. Choked to death by some beast or other. Think of it—think of it!"

Gene Caspar seemed to startle.

"I was thinking of it," he apologized, as if snatched from melancholy contemplation.

"The poor old man was out there fighting for his life, Mr. Caspar, while you and I were sitting so peacefully in your office, smoking our cigars. Even while we were talking he might have been out there screaming for his life, and no one to hear him!"

Mark Pettergrew leaned his head against a vine-woven pillar of the porch, and began to sigh with dry sobs. The honeysuckle was intoxicating; Sheriff Caspar found it so. Gene Caspar felt his knees heavy and leaden. Far away rolled down the mighty Mississippi. It does not stop for news of birth or death—not for the news of the birth or death of continents.

"So you have placed the time when he was killed?"

"It must have been then," said Mark Pettergrew.

Old Caspar sat down. He pulled at his pipe. His chair creaked unpleasantly.

"Is that everything John Johnson told you, Mr. Pettergrew?"

Mark fell into that chair which Ed Manners had occupied earlier in the evening. From one pocket to another he fumbled for a cigaret.

"Johnson only happened to stumble on *it* by chance. If it hadn't been for that, he might have lain there for weeks in the sun and the rain, and perhaps have lain there forever."

"Not likely," said Caspar. "Your uncle was a big man in this town. He would have been missed in a few hours. Tell me everything you know about this fellow Jackson, Mr. Pettergrew. I'd like to have a little talk with him."

"He—oh, he beat it back to the hill-country, Mr. Caspar, just as soon as he had seen me and blurted out the news. He's afraid of you, and afraid of all the courts of law and inquests which might grab hold of him. A moonshiner, you know—a poacher in the closed season. And then he was afraid you might think he had had a hand in it. You won't lay your hands on *him*."

"Still, I'd like to see him, this John Johnson. You're sure he didn't have anything to do with it?"

"Well, I don't know. But how could he—and what for?"

"His story sounds pretty flimsy to *me*," said old Caspar, weaving his fingers together and halting his rocker. "Men don't go hunting rabbits in that patch of brambles. No, sir. I can tell you! Now as for this Jack Jackson——"

"John Johnson," Mark Pettergrew corrected him impatiently. "I don't see what business he would have to harm the old major. If he had been the one to do it, do you think he would have dared to come and tell me about it? He would have hit for the hill-country faster than a horse."

"That is the very thing he would do, run and tell you," said old Caspar, "so that no one, least of all yourself, would suspect him of having a hand in it."

Mark Pettergrew leaned back in his chair.

"Suspect him if you want," he said sulkily. "I want to find the man who did it."

"That isn't at all impossible," said old Gene Caspar. "You did right in coming to me first thing with this news. Wait a minute. I want to telephone."

Mark Pettergrew sat in impatient silence, clutching the arms of his chair. He could hear Gene Caspar stumbling around on the inside of the house, and then his slow voice as he rang up Ed Manners on the telephone.

"Ed, this is Gene. Ed, there's been murder—Major Pettergrew—yes, Major Pettergrew—murder. Yes, I know it is awful. What's that? That would be a good idea. You're the doctor.—No. Maybe I have an idea. The old head's still working.—You do that, Ed. All right."

Mark Pettergrew eyed Caspar suspiciously as he fumbled his way out through the screen-door. But even if the night had been several degrees lighter sharper eyes than those of young Pettergrew would have been needed to read the thoughts of those wise old eyes.

"What's the idea of calling up Doctor Manners?" he asked a little bruskly.

"Oh, he's a doctor. Some one will have to certify to the death."

"You're going out there tonight? I don't want——"

"You don't want to come with us? I don't blame you. No, I'm not going there tonight. Your Uncle Jefferson will have to bide for quite a while, and I guess he'll bide till morning. I couldn't do anything tonight."

"You can in the morning?"

Gene Caspar snorted.

"I'm your elected sheriff, and you can trust I'll find out who it is. If I don't know already——"

"You think—" began Mark Pettergrew.

"So he was choked to death," went on Caspar, waving the interruption away. "There will be more nail-prints and finger-prints, not to speak of being able to measure the span of the murderer's hand, than enough to hang the Governor of Tennessee, if he was the one that did it. No one will get away with anything on me!"

"That is right," said Pettergrew, nodding thoughtfully. "There might be those traces. You are pretty sharp, sheriff."

"Oh, I am no fool, Mr. Pettergrew, even if I am getting old."

The sheriff spoke confidently. But to himself he was thinking:

"Will there be any such traces? Will there—will there?"

"Well, good night, Mr. Caspar."

"Good night, Mr. Pettergrew. You've done all you can; I wouldn't worry. Pleasant dreams to you— They ought to be pleasant! I guess that Daisy Manners——"

"I haven't seen her for a week," said young Pettergrew stiffly. "I reckon she's clean through with me, I don't reckon."

With this ambiguous statement, he left.

MRS. CASPAR was sleeping restlessly in the stifling heat of middle night when old Gene softly pushed his little car out of the barn and trundled it fifty yards away. Not even her sharp ears could hear him start it, nor hear him as he drifted down the street.

Three or four squares away Gene Caspar halted as a negro, gray-faced and ghostly terrified of the midnight, came slinking down toward him.

"Hey you, boy! Half a dollar if you come with me."

The negro did not ask where to.

"My name is Ebenezer," he stated inconsequentially, "and, boss, I'm youah meat!"

He would have gone to —— with a white man for a quarter, and to the bramble-patch for forty-five cents.

THE man who had killed Major Pettergrew came back to the bramble patch that night! He drew his car stilly to a halt at the edge of the bramble-thickets. The cottonwoods raised white arms, threatening, mute, cold as gray gravestones. Beyond them sparkled the star-strewn Mississippi. This was a night of wondrous moon. Softly the man slipped from his car, venturing warily toward the somber thickets. Willingly they parted for his form; with deceitful gentleness they let him push through. Perhaps his steps found that very path beaten by him and the dead man on the afternoon. He walked. He crept. The thistles clawed at his thighs.

And the cottonwoods enfolded him. The Mississippi rumbled. There were prickles scratching at his ankles, but a more poisonous itching at his eyes. He bent his glance. The cottonwoods were dark. Their dismal forms bent inward with a sigh. Here it was—here—here——

There was a scream. The man leaped to his feet and ran. Blindly, shriekingly. The thistles clawed at him now, and would not let him go. Again, as on the afternoon, he fell face first among those scratching briars. His face was torn and bleeding. He heard the scream behind him again, swelling out from the cottonwoods as if the scream had wings. It was alive. The man stumbled to his feet, tearing the burrs from his breast. He clumped on with frantic heart.

Only the scarlet tanager whistling from the cottonwoods.

A motor was humming far down the road from town. The man leaped into his own car. He set in the gears with a harsh crash, and bent to the wheel, driving hard away. The motor lights were on him, but they dimmed in the distance, so fast did he take wings to himself, wrap about his flight the fury of the whirlwind.

The bramble-burrs had got beneath his shirt. They tortured him like smoking nails.

SHERIFF CASPAR walked up and down in front of the house of Mark Pettergrew. It had been an hour that he had kept that patient pacing. Finally a light appeared in an upper window. Mark Pettergrew thrust forth his head.

"Is that you, Mr. Caspar?"

"None other."

"And you want to see me?"

Pettergrew came down-stairs at Caspar's assent. Lights winkled on in the lower windows. Minutes passed by, and Pettergrew at length threw open the door, letting loose on the clear night a shaft of light.

He had not been entirely undressed, evidently, when he spied the sheriff, for though he was in dressing-gown, the edges of a white shirt and red cravat showed above the collar of the cumbrous garment. Mark half-hid himself around the edge of the door, as if ashamed to be seen in this state of sartorial shame. Heat was dripping down his fat face, and he wiped it continually with a handkerchief. Warily and suspiciously he stared at old Caspar. The sheriff seemed to take no note of that. He walked up and strode in the door.

"You can take that gun out of your pocket, Mark."

"Oh," said young Pettergrew, bringing the hidden weapon to the light and laying it on a table. "I didn't know who it was at first. And after today——"

"I don't blame you for being scared."

That didn't seem to console Pettergrew. He still kept his handkerchief to his face, mopping it with tiresome dabs.

"Cut yourself with the razor?"

"No; the heat. You scared me at first when I saw you on the sidewalk out there, Mr. Caspar. You looked mighty like that fellow Jack Jackson."

"Oh, so I look like John Johnson, do I?"

"Jack Jackon. I'm beginning to suspicion that fellow. What was it you wanted of me, Mr. Caspar?"

Caspar yawned, flinging himself into a chair. Mark Pettergrew also sat down, wrapping his robe carefully about him.

"When I telephoned to him I asked Doc Manners to drop around here, Mr. Pettergrew. Hope you don't mind?"

"You think——?"

"Good ——! Sure I do. There—listen! That's his car now, I'll bet you thirty thousand dollars. You can bet that much now, can't you, Mr. Pettergrew? That's his old rattling car. Sounds like he's been burning her up fast and furious."

"His car," repeated Mark Pettergrew agreeably, though a little stupidly.

"Hi, Ed! Come in," the sheriff called through the window.

Old Ed Manners walked in, peering curiously about the room. Mark Pettergrew met his gaze in lowering surprize. The breath of the young lawyer was heavy, heavier than it needed to be for this stuffy Summer evening. The glance of both Caspar and the host fell to Manners' feet.

From waist to ankles he was covered with a myriad clinging burrs, so thick they seemed to make his trousers green. Manners did not appear to know that. Mark Pettergrew watched him with a curious fearfulness. The stillness in the room was lumbering and dark, though half a dozen lights were burning.

Ed Manners looked from Pettergrew to Mark in surprize, evidently not yet having seen the briars.

"Well," he said languidly, dropping into a chair and stretching out his legs, "I went out there to the briar-fields, as you said would be a good thing when you telephoned, Gene. *He* was there, all right, whoever he was, snooping around in the brush——"

"Thought he would cut away the fingerprints," said Caspar with a tiger grin. "He took my word to heart."

"How's that? The fellow heard my car and ran, and when I got there I couldn't see any one, though I got out and beat around in the bushes for a while. I humped back into my car and headed for town hot on his trail. I lost him——"

"Sit steady, Mr. Pettergrew!"

Ed Manners reached down and began to claw at the brambles at his knees. "Hello—hel-*lo*. I didn't know I'd caught these fellows. They stick. They certainly do stick. I've ruined a good suit Look—they're the same as that little one I picked from your sleeve tonight, Gene."

Ed Manners was staring curiously at old Caspar. Mark Pettergrew's hoarse breathing could be heard, rumbling as loud as the Mississippi. The dreadful minutes passed them by. Stealthily the fingers of Mark Pettergrew reached to his own knees, and he began to pluck with Falstaffian hands at the wool nape of his dressing-gown. His hands had fallen from his face. The myriad scratches on it were ragged red in the light.

"Who *is* your barber, Mark?" asked Caspar quietly, repeating the question he had put that afternoon. "Those were powerful mean scratches on your face when you were in my office—they are meaner now, and redder. Did Jack Jackson make them, or John Johnson, or the bogy man—Drop that gun!"

Old Gene Caspar fell across the floor. His tough right arm wound in the arm of Mark Pettergrew. Dreadfully he stared him in the face. Mark Pettergrew struggled to rise. He glared fiercely at the sheriff and Doctor Manners. His knees were bending for a spring, his hands were clutching to claw. Old Caspar tightened his hold. He snapped the arm of Mark Pettergrew back of him, and the big fat man was helpless.

"So you came in my office and sat for three hours waiting for me, did you?" Caspar jeered. "I was in there up to fifteen minutes before I saw you. I knew you were planning some sort of an alibi, and there was murder in your face——"

"You lie—you lie!"

"Same sort of bramble-briar you picked off my sleeve—that's right," said old Caspar to Manners. "I got that from the tie of this fellow in the afternoon. He's a slick one—changed his clothes down to the last stitch when he came home from there, just as he hopped into the house and changed his clothes when he saw me keeping guard out in front. But he kept on the crimson tie, and a briar was stuck to it."

"You lie——"

Mark Pettergrew's frantic fingers were pulling at his cravat. A little burr came off of it. Its nettles spiked the soft flesh of his thumbs.

"Speak up, Mark Pettergrew, and tell us how you did it!"

But Mark Pettergrew shook his head. His fat lips were grimly obstinate. Old Caspar smiled. Darkness fell upon them with a crash.

The darkness. Mark could feel the heart of old Caspar panting by his side. There was a stirring in the draperies—the black air of the hot room was filled with wind—a moaning voice began to cry. Then up from the darkness, up from hell, up from nowhere, appeared a shadow. It took form. It was a grisly thing of white.

"Ma'k—Ma'k—don' you lay youah hands on me—Ma'k, it is so lonely lying heah by the rivah, and the rivah is moanin', Ma'k. Why did you do it?"

The voice of the dead moaned more than had the river. It was the damnable voice of all graveyard things. Slowly it stepped toward Mark Pettergrew, holding forth a sheeted arm. Mark Pettergrew was struggling and strangling more ferociously and horribly than a chained beast in the leathery, sure clasp of old Gene Caspar. The thing drew near to him. Its awful eyes were white as heat. The very walls of the room seemed to catch and hurl back the hoarse rasping of his breath as the fat man fought to break free.

"Why did you do it, Ma'k?" moaned the voice slowly in dismal monotone.

"For your money, —— you! The light—the light—the light— And chase that black thing away!"

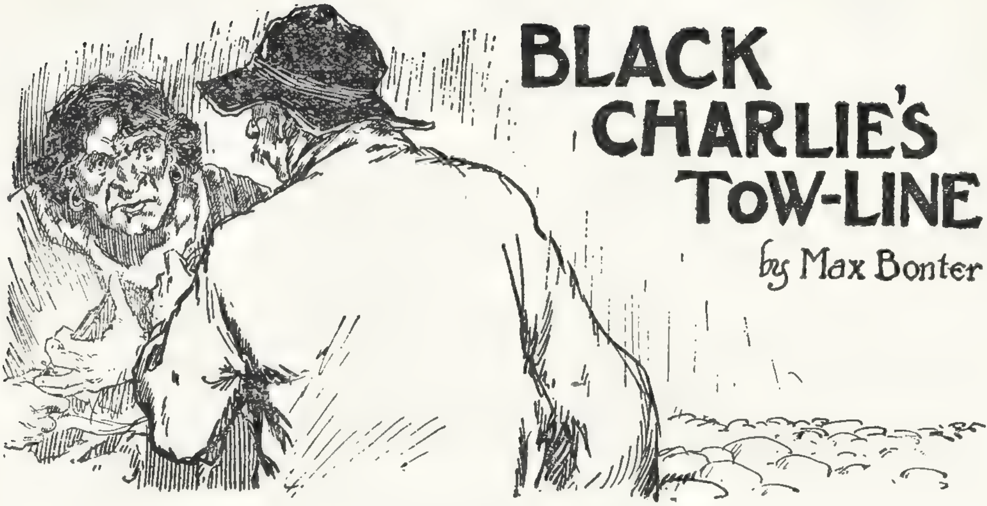
The light flashed on again and Mark Pettergrew stared stupidly at the sheeted form of a grinning negro.

"You earned your half-dollar, Ebenezer," said Gene Caspar. "Now take off that sheet and beat it for home."

"Well," said Ed Manners. "Well!"

"Well enough. I thought a man crazy enough to commit murder would be caught by a trick like this, though there are other things enough to hang this fat round neck. You'd better be telling Daisy to take a new shine to that Saint Lus drummer, Ed, for it will be a long day before she goes before the bar of heaven upon the arm of this!

"Come along, you! Let me straighten out your hair—there's a burr in your bright brown locks. A little bramble-thistle. All right, it's out. Come along!"



BLACK CHARLIE'S TOW-LINE

by Max Bonter

Author of "N'Yawk and Elsware," "The Cushions," etc.

"I'VE only got a dime," said "Black Charlie."

"Booze cost feefteen a-cent, Bleckie."

"I kin git it fur a dime up on Seneca Street, Mary. They's a joint up there that sells it fur a dime a shot."

The woman hesitated, scanning the man's face with her appraising black eyes. She was a slight little person, simply dressed in black. Her prominent forehead and long, straight nose suggested perspicacity.

"If you can get for dime, I sell for dime, too," replied Mary.

She opened a crockery cabinet and pulled a quart bottle from the top shelf. A moment later Black Charlie tossed a dram of the moonshine into his gullet.

"Ah-h," he breathed hoarsely with a squint of satisfaction.

The man was swarthy and heavy-limbed. He wore a suit of over-alls, a black shirt, and a fireman's cap.

"Bummed this dime frum Jimmy McBride," he admitted in a sudden burst of loquacity. "Best smoker on th' Lakes. Shipped this mornin' on th' *Nort' Wind.*"

"Stimboat?" asked Mary, with a prompt flicker of interest in her big eyes.

"Sure—steamboater," said Black Charlie.

"W'y you don' breeng heem roun', Bleckie? I got lots stimboat men, customer. I got good-a trade."

"Sure, I know you got th' trade, Mary. You don't soak th' guys as much as th' Main Street dumps. I'll git Jimmy's tow-line w'en he hits port an' bring him over. He's a good spender."

Black Charlie's furtive and bloodshot eyes followed the woman while she waded briskly into her household chores. She washed and dried the breakfast dishes, polished the big range and then squilgeed the living-room floor, meanwhile chasing Black Charlie into the doorway that led into the grocery.

"Mary, you got th' right dope. You sure keep th' joint clean," grinned Charlie with undisguised flattery. "How's chances fur another shot?"

"I no trus', Bleckie," replied the woman soberly.

"Sure you do, Mary. They's steamboat guys that owes you as high as five or six bucks."

Mary set a huge pot of spaghetti to boil. A short, black-mustached man entered through the street door, passed through the grocery and stepped into the living-room. He carried a two-gallon olive-oil can.

"To-*nee!*" cried the woman sharply.

A short, squat man entered from a dark region at the back of the living-room. He nodded familiarly to the man who carried the olive-oil can, and then passed through to the grocery, taking up his station unobtrusively by the front door.

Mary took eight empty quart bottles from the top shelf of her crockery cabinet and placed them upon the table. The

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"*Black Charlie's Tow-Line,*" *copyright, 1922, by Max Bonter.*

stranger tilted his olive-oil can and filled all the bottles with a brownish fluid. Mary, with occasional stealthy glances through the open doorway at the silent watcher who stood by the street door, picked up the filled bottles and stowed them carefully away upon the top shelf.

"Today trade," smiled Mary at Black Charlie after the stranger had taken his empty can and departed.

Charlie had made himself at home in a big chair, sunk in moody silence. He watched the gradual arrival of Mary's day's trade. At intervals the street door of the grocery would give forth a tinkled warning when, upon being opened, it banged against a little suspended bell. Then Mary would glance swiftly out from the living-room, scanning and classifying each entrant and satisfying herself instantly as to the identity of each. Those who understood the procedure would simply walk through the grocery into the living-room and stand expectant beside the crockery cabinet. That action spoke more understandingly than any word.

"Have a drink, Blackie. Goin' sailin' this year?"

The man in the chair sprang abruptly out of his reverie and stood on his feet. He clinked glasses with a weatherbeaten man with grizzled hair, who wore a peaked cap.

"Sure, mate. Soon as I git away from th' moonshine."

"Then you'll never go sailin', Blackie," grinned the other.

Black Charlie emitted a shameless guffaw.

"Did th' fleet git away?" he inquired.

"Eight o'clock. The *North Wind* in the lead. We pull out at noon for Milwaukee."

"That's th' first mate o' th' *Mullen*, Mary," said Black Charlie a moment afterward.

"Sure. I know heem," said the woman. "Good-a man."

Black Charlie sank comfortably back into his chair. Dinging a shovel in a ship's firehold was not nearly so satisfactory a proceeding as a seat and free moonshine in Mary's back room.

"I'll ship later on," he grunted, "atter I git Jimmy McBride's tow-line."

Steamboaters and dock men came and went. Occasionally one of them would buy Black Charlie a drink. His eye-openers finally aggregated five. His swarthy visage acquired a purplish tint, and his bloodshot eyes cleared and sparkled with alcoholic intensity.

Black Charlie stood on his feet and walked energetically about the establishment. A troop of little children scrambled down the stairs and raced into the living-room, eager for dinner. They were of both sexes, and of ages ranging from two to ten years. Charlie patted them on their heads with flattering comment and maudlin familiarity.

Another woman entered—a lantern-jawed, leather-faced crone with amber-colored eyes. She nodded to Black Charlie. The latter was about to take his departure and leave them undisturbed at their midday meal, when the young proprietress called him back.

"You breeng you frien 'roun', Bleckie?"

"Sure, Mary. I'll steer him over t' th' joint."

"Well, don't go 'way med, Bleckie."

Mary whisked a bottle from the top shelf of the crockery cabinet. Black Charlie swallowed his sixth. Then he wandered out into the grocery, where he found the short, squat watchman patiently sharpening a long, keen-pointed blade on the wheel of a truck that had been canted back against the wall.

"No work, Tony?"

The Sicilian paused in his task, and his thin lips twisted into a sneer.

"Noddeeng," he replied shortly. "No work all-a Weent'."

"She's been a tough Winter, all right," agreed Black Charlie.

"You buy-a dreenk?" continued Tony while he proceeded to give his stiletto's point an exquisite keenness.

"Broke," replied Black Charlie dismally. "But I've got a tow-line fur next week, Tony. Jimmy McBride made th' *Nort' Wind* fur D'loot. I'll steer him over w'en he gits back."

The Sicilian cast a swift look into Black Charlie's gleaming eyes. Black Charlie grinned knowingly and swaggered out into the street.

The crone went from the living-room into the grocery to get some eggs and, pausing a moment, inquired with solicitude—

"No work-a, Tonee?"

Into the Sicilian's jet-black orbs flashed a ray of passion.

"*Dio*, no!" he hissed. "No work-a, no mon'—noddeeng! No work-a all-a Weent'!"

He passed a brown and calloused thumb over the edge of his stiletto.

"I *keel!*" he hissed suddenly and impulsively between his clenched teeth.

Something like a responsive spark seemed to flicker a moment in the crone's amber-colored eyes.

II

JIM McBRIDE was as clean a young American as ever dinged a shovel on a fire-deck. When the ice broke up in the Spring and the up-lake ports flashed word to Buffalo that the channels were clear, McBride was the first stoker to sign on for a trip. He made the *North Wind*, a 600-footer chartered to bring back grain from Duluth. At the point of a wedge-shaped formation of rival freighters the *North Wind* smashed her way through the vast field of rotting ice that clogged Lake Erie's eastern end and choked the Niagara River. She forged into clear water, first of all the fleet.

"We're ahead," growled the old red-faced skipper through the speaking-tube to his chief engineer. "Now, *keep* ahead."

The chief turned over the skipper's orders to the second. The second was a fat jolly man who went into the fire-hold and stood with feet planted wide apart after the manner of an old salt, and eyes cocked upward through the haze at the quivering indicator of the steam gage.

"Sock it to her, Mac," he grinned.

McBride could make steam. With uncanny precision he kept the gage's indicator hovering just under the popping point. The *North Wind* raced toward the Detroit River, belching a long black bow across the April sky. Fourteen freighters were strung out behind her, and in the fire-hold of each a black gang toiled and swore and sweated, and strove to rob the *North Wind* of her place.

The stokers of the *North Wind* were mostly foreigners. Whenever a pair of the foreigners went on watch the trailing freighters crept slowly, slowly closer. Then a deep furrow would wrinkle the chief's placid brow, and up in the pilot-house the skipper's square jaws would eject streams of profanity and tobacco-juice.

But when McBride and his partner went on watch the *North Wind's* big boilers made steam. Then the second would grin and report the fact to the chief. Immediately the chief would give orders to throw her cut-offs wide open and to put her up to eighty revolutions. Whereupon the *North Wind* would draw slowly forward to her original lead. Then the skipper's red visage would assume the jovial outlines of a full moon, and he would cram a whole fistful of scrap tobacco between his jaws.

When the *North Wind* checked down at the mouth of the Detroit River she was one-half mile in the lead. In the Lake of St. Clair shallows she was still one-quarter mile in advance of her nearest competitor. Port Huron dropped astern, and the long race was carried briskly out upon the sparkling bosom of Lake Huron. There, with a strong southwest breeze fanning her port quarter and McBride and his partner in the fire-hold, the *North Wind* increased her lead to a thousand yards. When the two weary coal-heavers washed up and went into the firemen's mess the grizzled old lake cook chased out the lazy young messman and served them two juicy planked steaks with his own hands. The skipper went gleefully to bunk after turning over the watch to his first mate.

Next morning the Spring fleet split into two sections. Seven of the freighters swung westward through the Straits of Mackinac toward the Lake Michigan ports of Milwaukee and Chicago. The remaining eight continued on their way to Duluth.

The *North Wind* led her seven rivals through the serpentine channel of St. Mary's River. She locked first through the Soo. She sped across Whitefish Bay, rounded the big Fish Light and lay over westward toward Duluth. After her the envious procession of freighters went doggedly, rolling and pitching in a choppy sea and leaving long trails of black soot across the clear northern blue.

Every time the foreigners went on watch in the *North Wind's* fire-hold her lead decreased. Then a frown would crease the chief engineer's calm forehead. Then the skipper would curse and viciously squirt tobacco-juice upon the pilot-house deck.

But when McBride and his partner went on watch, and when, after they had pulled their fires, the steam-gage indicator swung to, and stayed just under, the popping point; then the old chief would open wide her cut-offs and give her eighty revolutions, and the skipper would dive into his pocket after his tobacco-pouch and slap his legs in glee.

Thus to the Duluth breakwater. There it seemed at last as if Fate was about to nullify the results of the stokers' heroic strife. It seemed as if they had striven a thousand miles in vain. The strong breeze had shifted to the southeast and had backed up into the harbor a mass of rotting drift ice that now, rising and falling on the swell, interposed a barrier to further speedy progress.

"Have we got so far," growled the skipper, his red face redder still with vexation, "only to lose out on account of a blasted patch of ice? Only half a mile more, dang it!"

The *North Wind* buried her stem in the soft mass and struggled for headway. Up from the horizon the column of pursuing freighters steamed swiftly, like a squadron of warships at sea. But even while the skipper paced moodily up and down his bridge and eyed his oncoming rivals, he saw an ice-breaker putting out from Duluth—a big ice-breaker forcing her way out beyond the breakwater and smashing a clear channel through to the inbound ships.

Straight toward the floundering *North Wind* came the sturdy craft—even up to within twenty yards of the stalled freighter's stem. Then the ice-breaker began to back shoreward through her own channel. The skipper drove his ship through the intervening strip of ice and followed.

As the *North Wind* poked her nose around the breakwater and steamed slowly into Duluth harbor, there arose a furious screeching and booming of harbor craft. All manner of whistles were represented there, from the shrill voices of the ship chandlers' launches and supply boats to the deep and resonant bass of the powerful lake tugs.

The skipper of the *North Wind* waved his cap exultantly in the air. His crew were crowded to starboard, gazing up at the city on the hill and broadly grinning.

Two stokers, just off watch, stumbled up the stoke-hole ladder to the main deck and filled their lungs with air. Their bare arms were black with coal dust. Sweat still dripped from their noses and coursed in tiny streamlets through the smudge on their cheeks. They looked haggard, spent.

"Put it there, Mac, old boy! We're *first!*"

The two American stokers laughingly shook hands.

ONE-HALF million bushels of Western wheat thundered into the *North Wind's* hold. The golden streams spouted forth from the gigantic elevator through a dozen chutes that had been lowered over the freighter's open hatchways. The flowing of the grain was accompanied by a quiet thunder and a sharp hissing sound that was not unlike an intensified pattering of hail. The huge hull settled almost visibly. A thick cloud of grain dust hung over her decks.

In one hour and twenty minutes from the time she had tied up at the elevator the ship was moving lakeward, her deckaroos sweeping the loose grain from her decks into the hatchways and battening down the hatch covers. There had been no time for the crew to go ashore in Duluth and stretch their legs. The *North Wind* was already Buffalo-bound, moving out on the heels of the ice-breaker through the rotting ice.

She had run up light from Buffalo at fifteen miles* an hour. Now, with twelve thousand tons of cargo in her hold, she was traveling homeward at ten. She cleared Lake Superior ahead of a threatening Spring blow, locked through the Soo, plowed the length of Lake Huron and at last made Detroit, checking down for the mail boat in the Detroit River.

"Anybody ahead of me for Buffalo?" roared the skipper anxiously.

"The *Clyde S. Mullen* from Milwaukee with grain!" sang out the mail man with monotonous indifference as he swung clear. "Passed one hour ago."

The captain's red face showed great chagrin. He went quickly aft and sought the chief engineer.

"Blast it!" he stormed. "I'd sooner be beat by any other bottom on the Lakes than the *Mullen!* Have I got to tail her into Buffalo?"

The chief looked at the skipper and waited.

"I'll give those hunkies double pay from here to port if they'll beat the *Mullen.* She's ten miles ahead."

"Skipper," replied the chief, "we've already got two firemen aboard this boat. Maybe the extra change will wake up the others."

He gave the skipper's orders to the second. The second told the news to the foreigners. The foreigners made some extra steam for the extra money; and when dawn appeared the skipper made out the *Mullen*, adjudging her through his binoculars to be seven miles ahead on the Buffalo course.

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*Speed on the lakes is usually computed in miles instead of knots.

"We're fifty miles from Buffalo," said the skipper to the chief.

"The *Mullen* is still seven miles ahead of us. Can't you give her the limit—and then some? Is there no way to make it, chief?"

"Who's on watch?" asked the chief of the second.

"McBride and his partner just went on," replied the second.

The chief calmly stroked his chin.

"My machinery is almost new," he soliloquized. "The factor of safety would be about five. That is," he continued with an apologetic glance at the skipper and the engine-room subordinates, "the ratio of the bursting point to the point of safe operation would be as five to one."

The chief still cogitated.

"I have confidence in my machinery," he mused at length.

Then he called over the second.

"Screw down your safety valves," he directed quietly. "Open wide your cut-offs. Your firemen have got to work."

Then he called the water-tender.

"Keep your water just three inches over the crown sheet. But no lower. I've got a wife and kid."

The skipper looked at the chief and his eyes twinkled. Without another word the "Old Man" walked into the fire-hold. McBride and his partner were pulling their fires. The fire-hold was filled with clouds of whirling smoke and coal gas. On the deck lay great piles of blazing clinker that the stokers had pulled from the grate-bars. The coal-passer on watch was sousing the glowing refuse with water.

The skipper stood by the port ash-gun, watching. After McBride and his partner had finished pulling their fires and pitched a fresh one, they stepped back under the ventilators and allowed the cool breeze from the deck to soothe their parched and sweat-drenched bodies.

"Fireman," said the skipper to McBride, roaring out his words to be heard above the roar of the fires, "the *Mullen* is seven miles ahead of us, and we're fifty miles from Buffalo! I'll give you and your partner ten dollars apiece if you'll beat the *Mullen* to the Buffalo breakwater. The chief will drive his machinery if you'll make him the steam."

McBride looked through the haze at the skipper.

"Skipper," he shouted, "to —— with the extra money! We only want our wages! If the chief's machinery will make it, we'll give him the steam!"

McBride and his partner pulled their sweat-soaked undershirts over their heads and picked up their shovels. The skipper stood by a moment, looking at the firelight playing over the rippling muscles of McBride's arms and back. He noted the short, round neck coming straight out of the shoulders and the knots that sprang out of Mac's biceps when he pitched a shovelful of coal. Then with a curious smile on his broad red face the Old Man climbed the stoke-hole ladder and walked for'ard to the pilot-house.

"Mate," he said with a good-humored growl, "we're going to travel."

A MILE off the *North Wind's* starboard bow a long gray line lay over the surface of Lake Erie. High above and back of this line appeared a sky-line of masonry half-veiled with a dusky haze.

On the *North Wind's* port side, but two hundred yards in advance of her, a 600-foot hull was pounding furiously through the still water. Across her stern-piece could be read the name *Clyde S. Mullen*. A whirling jet of black smoke fled aft from her funnel, screening the blue above and the green below.

A quiet crew lined the low after-rails of each throbbing and straining ship. In the pilot-house of each a captain and a mate stood shoulder to shoulder on watch.

The red-faced skipper of the *North Wind* crammed a fistful of scrap tobacco between his jaws.

"By ——, mate," he growled half-articulately through his champing teeth, "we've *got* to beat her!"

In the *North Wind's* engine room the chief stood by the bell indicator. A serene smile brightened his placid old face. The water-tender's gaze was riveted to his glass, the water in which was just three inches above the crown sheet.

Out of the boiler feed-pump ripped a continual and rhythmic succession of explosions like the banging of a saluting gun. The propeller-shaft ground out unceasing thunder. The whole steel framework of the *North Wind* violently trembled. The machinery's combined roar defied all speech.

"A hundred and thirty!" whispered the second in awe.

He stood by the revolution counter, looking anxiously over the intricate mass of crazy machinery, as if in fear that it would crash suddenly into scrap.

On the port side of the upper fantail the bos'n was scanning the taffrail log.

"Seventeen miles!" he mumbled almost unbelievingly. "Twelve thousand tons under her hatches, and she's making seventeen miles an hour! Gad!"

The fire-hold was little short of hell. A blanket of smoke hung low over the boilers through which the 40-watt incandescents that flanked the steam-gage could barely flicker. All three coal-passers were on watch, and beside them two oilers off duty toiled in the bunkers throwing coal to the firemen.

McBride and his partner were naked to the waist, and tongues of flame leaped out at them continually from white-hot fire-boxes as they threw open door after door and pitched the coal. No sooner had they slammed the last doors of one firing than the dropping of the gage forced them to yank open the first doors of the next. Sweat ran from their noses in constant streams.

Suddenly a great hissing became audible above the general chaos of sound. At the same instant the machinery's frightful roar subsided to a rhythmic and regular grind, and the furious vibration of the hull died fitfully away.

"We're checked!" gasped McBride. "She's poppin' off!"

He and his partner sprang forward, shut off the air dampers and slung open the fire-doors. As the intense heat surged outward into the fire-hold they leaped back under the ventilators, the sweat running even from their finger-tips.

Just then two of the foreigners came scrambling down the ladder. They were the oncoming watch.

"Booffalo!" they yelled excitedly. "B-o-o-f-f-a-l-o!"

The chief and second engineers came suddenly in from the engine-room and began shaking hands with McBride and his partner.

"We're behind the breakwater," smiled the chief.

"Ahead?" demanded McBride.

"Ahead," said the chief.

McBride and his partner threw down their shovels and painfully hoisted themselves up the stoke-hole ladder to the main deck. Two hundred yards astern they saw the *Mullen* following them, nosing her way carefully around the breakwater into the difficult harbor. The air was filled with a wild din of whistles. The old red-faced skipper left the wheel to his first mate and came aft looking for the chief engineer.

"First cargo into the port of Buffalo!" he growled with a fierce enthusiasm.

McBride and his partner gulped some mouthfuls of air and staggered to their bunks.

III

A SWARTHY man in a black shirt and fireman's cap climbed the ladder to the *North Wind's* main deck and walked aft to the firemen's quarters.* The second at that moment happened to be coming out of the chartroom.

"McBride off watch, chief?" queried the newcomer.

"Blackie, you get to —— off this boat and let those firemen sleep!" said the second sharply. "I know what you want, —— you!"

Black Charlie sulkily backed down the ladder and took up his station on the pier. The *North Wind* was tied up at one of the biggest elevators on Buffalo Creek. A little knot of scoopers had already assembled for the purpose of unloading her cargo. The deckaroos had pulled off the hatch covers and the "leg" was about to be lowered into the hold.

McBride awoke at last. His partner was tossing nervously about on his bunk. McBride scoured the coal dirt from his skin, put on his cleanest suit of dungarees and went for'ard to the skipper's quarters.†

"McBride, you're a fireman," said the skipper as he paid him his trip money. "Are you going to stick with me all season?"

"Sure am, skipper," said McBride. "I like your boat, and I like the way you run her."

Black Charlie's bloodshot eyes lighted

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*On a lake freighter the black gang's quarters are usually in the after superstructure.

†On a lake freighter the captain's quarters are under the bridge.

with anticipation as he saw a familiar figure climbing over the *North Wind's* side.

"W'at d' you say before th' leg goes in, Mac?" was his ready greeting.

It was an old scoopers' expression, now almost obsolete and meaningless. The phrase was remindful of the old days when grain shovelers drank growlers of beer on the job in order to keep the grain-dust washed out of their throats.

"I don't drink moonshine booze, Blackie," retorted McBride, "and near beer turns my stomach. The old times are dead, Blackie."

"I know w'ere you kin git a good shot o' dago red, Mac."

"You've got to come again, Blackie. That stuff's only grape juice and ether."

"No—on th' level, Mac. Th' guinneas drinks it theirselves."

McBride pondered. Nearly all the moisture had been fried out of his system by the fierce heat of the fire-hold and the almost super-human toil. A great craving for a soothing stimulant generated within him. Blue lines of fatigue still semi-circled his eyes, and his nerves were jumping.

The scoopers had dropped their leg into the vessel's hold and now up, up, up into the big elevator flowed the golden grain. A cloud of grain-dust blew suddenly across the pier. McBride coughed some of it out of his parched throat.

"So they drink it themselves, hey?" he demanded. "That don't sound so bad. You're the pilot, Blackie."

Black Charlie moved forward with alacrity. The men soon gained lower Main Street and swung upward.

"Who runs these joints now, Blackie?" asked McBride curiously as they passed a number of soft-drink places. "I ain't been around this street much for a couple o' years."

"Most o' th' 'Mericans has gone out o' business," answered Black Charlie. "They's furriners runnin' these dumps now. You kin git moonshine fur anyw'eres from two bits t' half a buck a throw, dependin' on how fur you go up th' street. Mary only soaks you fifteen fur hers. But up on Seneca you kin git a shot fur a dime."

"There was a time, Blackie, when I could come off a tough trip, put my belly up against one o' these bars, drink it full o' good beer and then go back and *sleep*," said McBride.

Under Black Charlie's pilotage the men walked along a street named after the foremost figure in American history. Then they entered the grocery that blinded the moonshine traffic in Mary's back room. The short, squat Sicilian stood close by the street door.

"Mornin', Tony," said Black Charlie with a significant grin. "No work today?"

"*Dio*, no!" cried the watcher passionately, scrutinizing McBride. "No work-a, no mon'—noddeeng! No work-a all-a Weent'!"

"She's been a tough Winter," agreed McBride.

At the tinkling of the bell a little woman in black cast a swift glance into the grocery.

"Mornin', Mary," greeted Black Charlie with the important air of a man delivering goods according to contract. "This is my frien', Jimmy McBride."

"Stimboat?" asked Mary, her shrewd black eyes instantly encompassing the fireman from the tiny crows' feet about his eyes to the scarcely eradicable clots of grime under his finger-nails.

"Sure," said McBride. "*North Wind.*"

A short, black-mustached man passed out through the grocery with an empty olive-oil can. Mary stowed seven of the filled quart bottles on the crockery cabinet's top shelf.

"Shot?" asked Mary, leaving the eighth bottle standing on the table.

"Got any wine?" queried McBride.

"Sure—good-a wine," replied Mary.

"Bring me a big one and have one yourself. Give Blackie what he wants."

"Shot fur mine," said Black Charlie.

The workless Sicilian sat down disconsolately in the back room, tilting his chair against the wall and drawing his cap partially over his eyes.

"Cheer up, Jack," said McBride. "Have a drink."

"Beeg wine," ordered Tony.

Mary drank a glass of her wine. McBride smacked his lips and settled comfortably back in his chair.

"Fill 'em up," said McBride. "I've been a long time dry."

"Tony's all right," communicated Black Charlie to the fireman in a hoarse whisper designed for the ears of all present. "He's a dock-walloper—no work all Winter. Helpin' Mary out fur his grub. Mary's man's in th' can—had a li'l' argyment——"

Here Black Charlie winked wisely at McBride.

"—good guy. Give you a shot w'en you need it. Mary's got a lawyer."

McBride listened dreamily to Black Charlie's chatter. He was not particularly interested in the fact that Mary's man was in jail on account of a cutting scrape. He was much more interested in Mary's red wine—a fair grade of red grape wine, the quality of which did not seem to be less on account of non-payment of an excise tax.

He sipped glass after glass of the wine. It ousted the overpowering lassitude from his being and steadied the jangled nerve-tissues that he had brought out of the fire-hold. The blue semi-circles disappeared from beneath his eyes, and they began to sparkle. He stood on his feet and walked about the establishment.

"You keep your decks clean, Mary," said McBride.

"Sure, kip clin," replied the woman proudly. "Stimboat men want clin. I got good-a trade—stimboat trade."

Mary's trade kept coming in instalments. McBride knew many of the steamboaters who entered there, and the entry of each of such acquaintances was the signal for a drink.

McBride stood his wine well; but Black Charlie, with numerous moonshines under his belt, was becoming talkative. He spoke flatteringly of Mary, of Mary's place, of Mary's man who was in jail awaiting trial, of Tony the dock-walloper, of McBride and of himself.

"Sit down, Blackie—you're rockin' the boat," said McBride in good-humored disgust.

A troop of little black-eyed children raced into the room and scrambled about the table in anticipation of dinner. An old woman next entered—a hard-featured crone with amber-colored eyes. She nodded to Black Charlie and looked at McBride. Mary took a huge pot of spaghetti from the range, stirred into it half a dozen raw eggs that the crone brought in from the grocery and seated her five children about the big table.

"Come on out and eat, Blackie," said McBride.

"You don' have to go out eat," remonstrated Mary. "Eat here. I geeve you good-a spaghett'."

McBride and Black Charlie pulled their chairs to the table and dined on spaghetti and egg in the midst of Mary's brood. The men devoured astonishingly large portions of the simple food.

"If no eat, no can dreenk," declared Mary wisely.

McBride paid her a dollar for the spaghetti. Then, beginning with the youngest, he made the round of the table and gave each of the five youngsters a dime.

"No work-a all-a Weent'," complained the Sicilian with a gleam of avarice in his black eyes. "No mon'—noddeeng."

"You might as well be happy, Bud," said McBride.

He handed him a dollar.

Black Charlie's alcoholized brain made a rapid computation, both of the amount of money that McBride had probably received for his trip and of the amount that he had already spent.

"Y' ain't furgittin' your ol' pal, Mac, are you?" he inquired enviously.

"I'll stake you later, Blackie," said McBride.

By four o'clock the good-natured fireman had spent his entire trip money. He was still smiling and standing on his feet.

"There goes the last of it, Blackie," he said with a grin, throwing a dollar bill upon the table.

Black Charlie's flaming physiognomy was a study in mingled emotions, of which reproach appeared uppermost. However, he was comfortably drunk, and his paunch was full of food. He was fast gravitating toward sleep. So he held his peace. Presently he shoved his chair unsteadily into a corner, sprawled out into as comfortable a position as he could assume and allowed his chin to drop down upon his chest.

"A sleep'll do him good," said McBride. "He was poppin' off too much."

"How many dreenk?" asked Mary.

"Everybody drinks," said McBride, "except Blackie."

Mary brought wine for the fireman, the dock-walloper, the old woman and herself.

"Good-a wine," she asserted reassuringly. "Moon-a shine no good."

"Now," said McBride, "I'm going to dig down and get some *real* money."

He thrust his hand into his shirt pocket and pulled out a big roll of bills. Mary and the old woman exchanged glances. The Sicilian was sitting, apparently oblivious of the act, with his cap pulled partially over his eyes. McBride tossed a ten-dollar bill upon the table and thrust the rest of the roll carelessly into his over-alls pocket.

"We'll drink it up," said McBride.

IV

AT EIGHT o'clock that night three thirsty steamboaters with their course laid for Mary's place paused a moment outside the grocery door and listened.

"Sounds like one o' them guinnea feeyestas!" exclaimed one of them with a chuckle. "But we'll bust in anyhow."

They found three of their own kin comfortably seated and with drinks in their hands. A fourth—a husky young fellow in naval dungarees, with flaming face and sparkling eyes, indubitably drunk but standing straight on his feet—was feeding records into Mary's big phonograph. The fifth was hunched in a chair in the corner, adding an occasional snore to the sum of sound.

The Sicilian was sitting bolt upright, his black eyes flashing in response to the music and the wine. Even Mary's dark orbs betrayed an unusual mistiness, and the fires of youth seemed to have been rekindled in the crone's amber eyes.

"Everybody drinks," said McBride.

"Here's how, stranger," said one of the newcomers, a weather-beaten man with grizzled hair, holding aloft his glass. "I don't know you, but whoever you are, I'll say I like a man that can get drunk on his feet. Now have one on me."

"I'm a marine smoker, partner," replied McBride, "and I've been a long time dry. Here's how."

Black Charlie opened his eyes in time to see McBride paying for the drinks. A moment later Charlie was on his feet, startled into sobriety by the size of the wad that McBride had pulled from his jeans.

"Give Blackie a drink," said McBride. "Now, Blackie, I'm going to stake you to your flop, and tomorrow I want you to come aboard and sign on for a trip."

"I can't git away frum th' moonshine so quick, Mac," protested Black Charlie.

"You'll never get away from it as long as you drink it," retorted McBride. "Anyway I'll take a bottle aboard to sober you up."

"I been on it too long, Mac. A bottle won't do it."

"The shovel will do it, Blackie. But I don't think you want to work."

"All-a time bum no good, Bleckie," said Mary.

"I look-a for work, but no geet-a da work, all-a da Weent'," declared Tony passionately.

The weatherbeaten old steamboater removed his peaked cap and passed a reflective hand through his fast-graying hair.

"Blackie," he said severely, "a man who drinks and won't work is a bum. But there's always a chance for a man who can drink and work. There was a certain tramp in this town in the old days. I knew him well. He was a good tramp, too. He beat his way twice to the Coast and back. He was a rummy, but he wasn't afraid to work. When he started to get up in the world he made a certain crack to some friends in this town—that he was going to drink his way into the White House. And he *did*. And now we'll have a little drink."

"And then we'll have another," said McBride.

"I don't know you, partner," said the grizzled old steamboater, "but my name's McFee, and I'm the first mate o' the *Mullen*."

"And my name's McBride," said McBride, "and I'm a smoke-shoveler aboard the *North Wind*. And I smoked her the last watch into Buffalo."

The mate of the *Mullen* got on his feet.

"Then, by——," he returned earnestly. "I'll say you can heave coal, and I want to shake hands with a real American fireman!"

At ten o'clock the mate of the *Mullen* and his two companions rose to take their departure.

"Fireman," said the mate to McBride, "your boat was light at six o'clock, and she moved to the P. & R. for coal."

"Much obliged to you, mate," said McBride. "You've saved me a hike."

The three steamboaters then left Mary's place—three good Americans with drinks under their belts going back to their job. McBride then handed Black Charlie half a dollar.

"Blackie," he said, "there's your flop. Tomorrow come down aboard the *North Wind*. There's a vacancy in her fire room. I'll get you signed up, and I'll sober you up, and you can make some dough, and you won't need to be chasing tow-lines."

"Good-a man," said the crone, patting the sleeve of McBride's jumper.

"You come back next-a treep?" asked Mary.

"Sure," said McBride.

"Ever'bodda come back," replied Mary proudly. "Treat ever'bodda right. Good-a trade. Stimboat trade."

Black Charlie sulkily put the half-dollar into his pocket. His long sleep had made him fairly sober. Sobriety was distasteful to him, and he wished to be drunk again.

McBride pulled the roll of bills from his pocket, peeled off another dollar and handed it to the dock-walloper.

"Hope you have better luck, bud," he said kindly. "It's pretty tough when you can't get work."

The Sicilian took the money and put it in his pocket. Black Charlie's unattractive countenance took on a still sourer aspect.

McBride led the way through the grocery to the street door, and it was observable that he staggered a few steps, straightening his gait, however, almost at once. Mary, the Sicilian and the crone were watching.

"To-*neel*" breathed Mary in a low whisper.

She spoke rapidly a few sentences in the liquid tones of her mother tongue. The crone nodded approvingly, while a steely glitter pierced the amber softness of her fading eyes. The Sicilian stepped forward through the grocery toward the street; and his short, squat body, notwithstanding the wine that he had drunk, moved with cat-like poise.

McBride said goodnight to Black Charlie and set his course for the P. & R. coal dock, which lay about half a mile to the west. Soon before him was discernible the wide expanse of Main Street, which it was necessary for him to cross.

His gradually submerging intelligence informed him of the presence of two uniformed figures standing on the corner beside a patrol box. Main Street was pretty "raw," and it was about the hour when staggering men would be pounced upon by the authorities and locked up.

The fireman wilfully forced his brain to rise above the sea of wine that was fast engulfing it. Gripping his condition in both hands, he steadied himself a moment and then broke naturally into the swinging roll of the American gob. He passed within two feet of the officers and stepped into the street, narrowly escaping collision with a taxicab that was rushing a fare down to the Lehigh Valley depot. McBride crossed Main Street without turning his head. He had scarcely even noticed the taxi.

"Cool-headed guy," muttered one of the officers, watching him.

"Fireman," responded the other. "Looks sober, too."

Through a maze of intersecting streets that curved and twisted bafflingly through the city's oldest quarter, McBride staggered persistently harborward. Even had he known that he was being followed the fact would have impressed him little, because every atom of his waning intelligence was employed in sensing direction and in keeping himself on his feet.

At last his light dropped below the horizon, and his brain was in twilight. Still he was not at the end of his endurance. Instinct and the subconscious mechanics of the human body kept him doggedly on his course. He was like a ship with a lashed tiller. Even through subconsciousness he carried resolutely on.

V

"WHAT time is it, buddy?"

"Six o'clock. Time t' go on watch."

McBride slid stiffly out of his bunk, holding his right hand to his forehead.

"I'm still pickled," he muttered confusedly. "What time did I blow in?"

"Day before yesterday," replied his partner with a grin.

McBride stared.

"You've been sleepin' thirty hours," went on his partner with a chuckle. "Th' chief said t' let you sleep. I've been doin' your tricks in the fire room."

McBride was running his fingers carefully through the pockets of his various articles of clothing.

"Clean," he announced at last. "Not a jit. I must have had about sixty bucks when I left Mary's place. Somebody beat me to it."

"It was about 'leven o'clock night afore last," said his partner. "I was readin' in th' bunk here, expectin' you back any minute. I hears a big splash back aft, like somebody fell overboard. I runs out on deck. It's purty dark, but I sees some guy makin' a gitaway acrost the pier. I gits a lantern, an' me an' th' second goes down on the pier under th' trussel. We finds you standin' with your back ag'in' one o' the wooden stanchions, sound asleep."

"Standing up?" queried McBride.

"Sure—asleep on your feet."

The two stokers eyed each other half-humorously a moment.

"We couldn't see anybody in the water," went on McBride's partner, "so th' second an' me give you a shakin' t' wake you up a little, an' then we managed t' git you up th' ladder an' into th' bunk."

McBride turned on the cold-water tap, soused his aching head and muttered:

"Serves me right. I was Black Charlie's tow-line, and it cost me a hundred bucks."

"Well," said his partner, "we're loadin' coal for Fort William."

"Suits me," answered McBride. "I've got to make another batch. And when we hit port again, buddy, I'll take you over to Mary's place. That's sure some joint."

AT FOUR o'clock on an afternoon two weeks later the *North Wind* tied up at a Buffalo elevator with grain from Fort William. A furious Spring gale had swept her over Lake Superior and the whole length of Lake Huron. Riding eastward through Lake Erie, the wind was on her port beam, and her entire hatch deck was awash. With ports, deadlights and boiler-room skylights battened down, the black gang was dizzy and half-nauseated with coal gas when she made port.

McBride and his partner had come off watch at noon, and as soon as the vessel docked they scrambled down the ladder *en route* for Mary's place, garbed in their cleanest dungarees and with their trip money already in their pockets. Inside the grocery door a stranger was on guard—a short, smooth-shaven man with amber-colored eyes who looked closely at McBride and his partner when they walked in. But Mary, looking quickly out from the back room, nodded smilingly to McBride, at the same time observing the tiny black crows' feet about his partner's eyes and the clots of grime beneath his nails.

"Stimboat?" asked Mary.

"Fireman—*North Wind*," replied McBride's partner.

"He's my buddy," said McBride.

"Wine?" queried Mary with a tactful smile.

"Sure. Everybody drinks," said McBride.

The short, smooth-shaven man walked back into the living-room while Mary brought the wine.

"My man," explained Mary to McBride. "He come out-a jell. Good-a lawy'."

"Partner, you've got a drink coming to you," said McBride. "You must have been a long time dry."

Mary unlocked a drawer of her crockery cabinet and drew out a leather pocketbook, from which she took a roll of bills. She handed the money to McBride.

"Last-a time you here," explained Mary, "you lose-a da mon'."

McBride counted the money. There were two twenties and two tens. He peeled off a ten-dollar bill and tossed it upon the table.

"We'll drink it up," said McBride.

The room was presently alive with little youngsters scrambling eagerly about the table for their supper.

"Eat," said Mary to the firemen. "If no eat, no can dreenk."

They drew their chairs to the table and devoured great portions of spaghetti and egg in the company of Mary and her man and their brood. McBride paid Mary a dollar for the spaghetti and then, beginning with the youngest, he gave each of the children a dime. The crone with the amber eyes next entered, nodding familiarly to McBride and looking closely at his partner.

A few minutes after six a short, squat man entered the street door and walked through the grocery into the living-room. His jumper and overalls were covered with flour, and a heavy freight hook circled his short neck.

"Ah-h!" he murmured ecstatically while his jet-black eyes flashed with pleasure. "My-a frien'!"

He patted McBride fraternally upon the sleeve of his jumper.

"How they comin', bud?" inquired McBride.

"Plentee work," responded the Sicilian joyfully. "Make-a da mon'. I buy dreenk."

"Last time I was here," said McBride, "I was Black Charlie's tow-line. Whatever became of him?"

A triangular glance, keen as a dagger's point and swift as a ray of light, flashed among Mary, the Sicilian and the crone. After a short interval Mary evidently considered herself to have been silently elected spokeswoman.

"Bleckie?" she asked smoothly—but a peculiar hardness had come suddenly into her soft eyes. "I guess-a Bleckie, he sheep. He no come-a back."

"About time he shipped," opined McBride. "He was getting to be nothing but a bum."

"No good-a man," declared the crone.

"Bleckie —— bum!" hissed the Sicilian between clenched teeth. "Bleckie *still!*"

McBride looked curiously at the dock-walloper. Then he went into the grocery to buy some cigars.

"Good-a man," said the crone, nodding her wise old head with unqualified approbation shining in her amber eyes.

The Sicilian sprang excitedly to his feet.

"My frien'!" he exclaimed, his black eyes flashing with loyalty and devotion. "I no geet-a da work all-a da Weent'! No mon'—noddeeng! He buy-a me plentee dreenk—geev-a me two-a dol'. My frien'!"

After this passionate outburst the dock-walloper reseated himself, his breast heaving with emotion. He pulled his cap partially over his eyes.

"You're right he's a good man," chimed in his partner stoutly. "He's one of th' finest young fellows that ever dinged a shovel on a fire-deck!"

A crowd of steamboaters, including the mate of the *Mullen*, were coming through the grocery toward the back room—a crowd of thirsty American steamboaters eager to wet their whistles. Mary, glancing swiftly through the doorway, saw them coming.

"I got good-a trade," she asserted proudly. "Stimboat trade. Ever'bodda come back. Treat ever'bodda right."

THE scoopers dropped their leg into the *North Wind's* hold, and she was light the following day at six o'clock. Then two tugs pulled her down the creek to the P. & R. coal-dock. Three days later she cleared port with hard coal for Superior.

Scarcely had the big vessel moved out of her dock when one of the pier men espied a strange object floating about in the eddies below the string-piece. He dropped the bight of a line and looped it deftly and firmly under and around his discovery, making the ends of the line fast to a bitt on the pier.

The morgue-keeper and two detectives arrived about half an hour later.

"Looks as if he'd been under about three weeks," said the pier man. "He come up t' th' top w'en th' *Nort' Wind* stirred up the water."

"His overalls pockets is turned inside out," remarked one of the sleuths. "He must have been robbed and thrown over the string-piece."

"Him?" returned the other detective scornfully. "I've known that bird for two or three years. Used to be a steamboater. Been runnin' up and down Main Street all Winter, lookin' for tow-lines. He ain't earned a cent in a year."

"Well," returned his associate, "then he robbed somebody else, and got robbed himself."

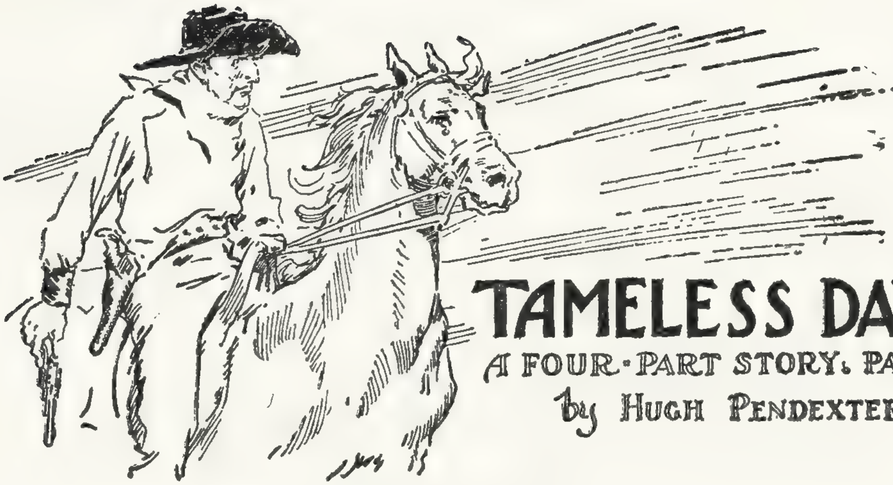
"He's got a good tow-line this time," said the morgue-keeper with a grin. "Last one he'll ever get. Haul away."

They hauled away on the stout hempen cord and pulled Black Charlie over the string-piece. Out of his bloated mouth and nostrils ran the filthy ooze of Buffalo Creek.

"Ugh!" grunted one of the detectives, gingerly loosening the mud-soaked apparel. "There's a little cut under his left shoulder blade."

"Stilett'," said the other as soon as he looked at the wound.

"That's what they git fur hangin' around them moonshine dumps," declared the pier man solemnly.



TAMELESS DAYS

A FOUR-PART STORY. PART I

by HUGH PENDEXTER

Author of "War Wampum," "Over the Rim of the Ridge," etc.

Foreword

A BLUE sky stretched from sunrise to sunset, and yet there was a shadow on the mountains. A September sun penetrated each deep and narrow gulch and briefly noted every frantic emprise of the gold-hunters; but always the shadow, even when the sun hung overhead. Wherever men toiled and won a competence or a fortune, there the shadow was. A curse to many, a menace to all, it extended from Fort Benton on the Missouri across the chaos of mountains, parks and basins, through the Medicine Lodge Pass over the main ridge of the Rockies, even to Salt Lake City.

To isolated horse ranches, to small vegetable farms, to lonely creeks, crept the shadow; the chilling fear of lawless men. This new land, which would swing into place among the Territories in May, 1864, was cursed by it. Like a blight it blanketed the first mining camps between the Three Forks of the Missouri, the Beaverhead basin, and the Deer Lodge Valley. It was an ancient shadow and has ever dogged the tracks of those who seek betterment through honest labor.

When the railway survey, conducted by Governor I. I. Stevens of Washington Territory, penetrated this land of giant mountains the seed was sown for the discoveries of astounding wealth. And while that epochal reconnaissance was being made there were lads at play in distant eastern States and on the coast of the Pacific whose wayfaring through the next decade was to bring terror to manly men and to themselves a sorry and shameful ending.

In this year of 1863 many of the ne'er-do-wells flocked to the Beaverhead country to trail those who bore the brunt of toil and to wrest from them the earnings of their hardihood and daring. Years ahead of the gold-seekers were Manuel Lisa, Kenneth McKenzie, Ashley, Carson, Bent, Bridger, Wyeth, Meek and Walker, and a host of other notable mountain-men. But never did the banditti fatten off the industry of the beaver-man. Not until color was found along Grasshopper Creek and the mining-town of Bannack City was established in 1862, did the vultures come.

In all that land of prodigious promise there was no honest man who did not sense the chill of the shadow. Whoever endeavored to convey his gold out of the country, or to send it out, found the odds against his treasure ever running the rapacious gantlet; for the robbery of stagecoaches, the holding-up of express shipments and individuals, outward bound from Virginia City and Bannack, was reduced to a system. There was no haphazard pilfering, no competition among the lawless upsetting their evil plans. Theft was so nicely schemed that little booty was overlooked. Like a series of screens the rapacity of the road-agents took its toll; what was permitted to pass through between Alder Gulch and Grasshopper Creek was

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"Tameless Days," copyright, 1922, by Hugh Pendexter.

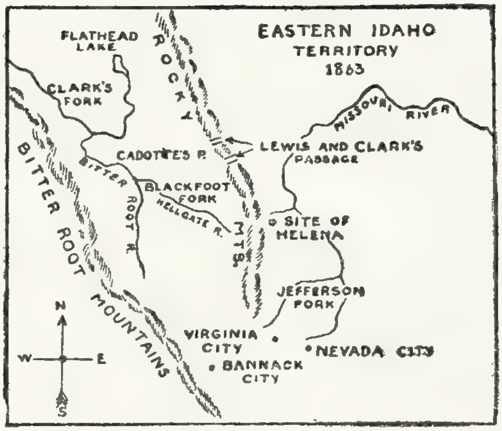
caught in the finer mesh below Bannack City.

Men starved and toiled and struck it rich, only to have the tentacles of the criminal organization dart out and appropriate the fruits of their efforts. And none knew whether his neighbor was a road-agent or an honest man; for there were more than a hundred members in the smoothly working predatory band, with spies in every camp, in the richer gulches, and often in the employ of the stage and freight lines.

When the first rumors reached Salt Lake City and Colorado of the rich diggings on the Salmon River a long line of immigration started for the new country. It was as irresistible and persistent as the mountain brook seeking the lowest level. But these adventurous ones were too late, and they found that all promising placers had been located by veterans of the pan and rocker from Oregon and California. But when the disappointed horde turned back from the Salmon they were met with stories of rich finds east of the Rockies, and at once it straggled through the mountains between Fort Lemhi and the heads of Horse Prairie Creek, and followed the cut-off south of the old Mormon trail to Bear Lodge and the Bitterroot valleys. And they carried with them the germs of what was to be one of the greatest criminal fraternities that ever bled a new country.

Grasshopper Creek, the first gulch worked east of the Rockies, soon proved to be the richest placer diggings since the halcyon days of California; and the shadow began to spread. As the news was carried out by freighter, by stage, by fleet mounted riders, the immigration increased, and the tameless men began to find each other and plan for the harvest. Bannack City boasted of its prosperity, and those who would not labor made it their headquarters. Then came the fabulous riches of Alder Gulch, and Virginia City was born.

Now the outlaws were so numerous and bold that they needs must have a leader, and captains and lieutenants. They also found it necessary to have a secretary to attend to the clerical work—grim bookkeeping! There were so many upon the rolls that signs and grips and a password became a part of their ritual. An active correspondence between Virginia City and Bannack called for spies and messengers. In the background, with their identity unknown, stood those whose duty it was to free a brother caught red-handed in a crime, to serve as officers of the law, to sit on juries.



All travel was methodically kept track of, from freight train to the individual, and the active members were apprized in good season of the coming of a victim. Whether a stage-coach, a horse or a person, the quarry was made known by some mark; and, armed with sawed-off shotguns, revolvers and bowie-knives, the operators of the dreaded band did their work. Wherever new discoveries were made and new settlements were formed the band reached out a greedy hand.

Nor did these parasites wait for night to conceal their enterprises. Men were shot down in daylight in public places. Stores as well as stages were robbed. And the ruffians boasted of their crimes while spending the spoils. The decent element lacked cohesion, and there were few who held their lives so cheap as to demand justice. Did one raise a cry in Bannack or Virginia the very man appealed to might be a member of the gang. There was no doubt but that certain men were robbers and murderers, but so long as no one could be positive of his neighbor's moral status there were few to offer resistance or seek reprisal.

So the shadow fell on dead men in town and gulch, men murdered for the dust and coarse gold they had panned out. It stretched from coast to coast, and fell on many a home where the head of the family would never return. But if, when Governor Stevens was making his survey, there were boys playing boyish games who were destined to rob and slay, also there were other youths on their way to avenge the outraged law and lift the shadow.

CHAPTER I

A SMALL MIGRATION

ONLY one of the Content family was loath to leave the two-room log cabin on the west fork of the Madison. This was Milot Content, the father, one of the first, excepting the men of the St. Ignatius Mission in the Flathead country, to sow and reap the virgin soil, and to prove there was gold in crops as well as in auriferous gravel.

While the big freight wagon was being filled with potatoes, rye and turnips he hobbled about and brooded over the crippled condition that made it necessary for him to seek the less rigorous climate of Salt Lake for the Winter. The efforts of his fifteen-year-old daughter, Josette, and of his son, Beach, to cheer him with reminders that Spring would soon come back and that he could return to the lonely valley, could not dispel his gloom.

Rheumatism, the foe of the wilderness roamers, had sunk its claws in him, and forced him apart from those now in a mad scramble for gold. And yet the little ranch house on the head of the Madison Fork had been a pleasing haven. If he could not search for gold he was tormented but little by seeing those who could. He had grown to relish the loneliness of the vegetable farm and to believe his rheumatism troubled him less than for any time during the last two years.

The phases of ranch life that appealed to him, however, affected his children unpleasantly. The girl, unused to isolation and lacking the solace of philosophy, was as eager to leave the place as was any young wild thing to escape from a trap.

The son, past his twentieth year, was the victim of blood heritage, and he felt the drive of the impulses which had sent his father into the mountains when beaver was worth ten dollars a pound, and St. Louis girls were proud to have an ambitious mountain-man for a sweetheart. He had not outwardly rebelled at his fate; for his duty was plain, and there was great affection between him and his melancholy father. But now that they must leave the Madison, with Content senior deciding it was best for Beach to remain for the Winter in Virginia City, the three returning to the cabin in the Spring, the young man could not conceal his exuberance.

"We'll see houses! We'll see people!" shrilly chanted Josette as she danced in and out of the house.

Her father stood in the sunshine of the late September day and winced under the monotony of her rejoicing but did not restrain her. She danced out to the vegetable patch, still shouting her glad refrain. Her brother, finishing a last survey of the harvested ground, grinned in sympathy and encouraged her.

"That's right, Joe. Let yourself out. We'll see something besides a straggling Indian. We're going to see folks. You'll have a bully time in Salt Lake City."

She stilled her song and was thoughtful for a minute.

"Wish you was going through with us, Beach," she sighed. "What few men have put up here overnight this Summer tell awful stories about Virginia and Bannack. They must be very wicked places."

"Pooh! No wickeder than when we came through Bannack in the early Spring," he scoffed. "And you haven't seen Virginia yet. It sprang up since we came here. But the one time I was there this Summer it wasn't any different from any new town. Lots of the talk about men robbing folks is all made up. I was there a whole two days and I didn't hear anything but 'gold' talk. That's all they talk about and think about —and I don't blame them. Several hundred new folks are coming into those two towns *every day*. Lord! Think of it! And we're lucky out here if we see a man once a month. Besides the folks pouring into Alder Gulch from over the Salt Lake Road and Fort Benton there are hundreds of miners returning from their diggings. Wish Williamson would come along. I'm keen to start."

"So am I!" she cried with a little shiver of joyous anticipation. "Daddy will cheer up when Williamson comes. Mighty good he's going through with us."

"Best sort of luck. Dad likes him. Funny how an old mountain-man like Ned Williamson ain't interested in gold. Just wants to ramble around. One of the first ones up here and hasn't caught the fever yet."

The two walked toward the house, assuming a sober deportment they did not feel, to announce all was ready for the start. Both were overjoyed when their father decided:

"We'll go. Hitch up. Williamson will

overtake us. Don't see why he couldn't have stayed here with us instead of gallivanting off to the Gallatin. Always a keen one to see what sort of country lies over the next divide. Beach, you can wear this. I'll keep the shotgun."

He handed over a long Colt revolver and added:

"But those who wear weapons usually use 'em. Be careful of trouble, son."

'I'll be careful, but no one's going to take any dust away from me while I'm looking," Beach stoutly assured him.

A spasm of pain passed over Content's face, and he warned the boy:

"You mustn't talk like that, son. If you make that sort of talk in Alder Gulch you'll find a heap of trouble brought to you. Be careful, be cunning, keep your mouth shut. Remember it's much better to be robbed than to be killed. If any one does tell you to put up your hands you be mighty spry in reaching for the sky."

"Oh, I won't make a fool of myself," promised Beach, ashamed of his boastful speech. "I don't really believe there's any danger of any one being robbed in Virginia. That talk is made up."

"There's truth in it," sighed his father.

Josette pointed a finger at her brother and cried:

"Hands up! Ah, smarty; that's the way they do it. What chance would you have to pull a gun?"

Abruptly her mood changed, and she flung her arms about his neck and begged:

"Oh Beach, if any one tells you to hold up your hands remember what daddy says and don't wait a second. Put them! Keep them up! I'd die if you wasn't here to meet us in the Spring."

"There! There! He'll be here," huskily muttered Content, shuffling to the door.

"Joe, you stop that foolish talk," commanded Beach, his throat feeling dry. "One would think I was going to Virginia on purpose to be robbed—or worse. Every one in Alder Gulch isn't robbed. Who'd want to trouble me? I haven't any dust. I'm going to get a job and save my wages. I'm too small game to be noticed even if the gulch is filled with road-agents, as some folks seem to think."

"It's bad enough," spoke up his father from the doorway. "Williamson told me much that you didn't hear. I shall worry about you."

"Stuff and nonsense, dad! If you talk like that I'll worry all Winter just because I'll be believing that you are worrying."

"You'd better keep all that you get for the truck and the outfit. I'll feel better if I know you have something to live on."

"No, sir! A miner who can't make his hundred a day is either lazy or unlucky."

"But you're no miner, Beach. It'll soon be too late to prospect. Water'll soon be freezing in the sluice-boxes. And you may not get work."

"They're paying from ten to eighteen dollars a day, and plenty of jobs. I'll take enough to stake me for a week. Then if I don't get work I'll hire out with a freight train and come on to Salt Lake City. But don't do any worrying about me, dad."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. It will make me feel better. Here comes a horseman from the Gallatin. Hope it's Ned."

IT WAS. Ned Williamson, famous mountain-man, had been in the country long before the coming of the gold hunter. He wore buckskins and moccasins. He had worked as expressman for Mullan the road-builder when the wagon road from Fort Benton to Walla Walla was put through. One of the incidents of his adventurous life was to have his horses give out while carrying dispatches from the Bitterroot Valley to Camp Floyd during severe Winter weather. Although snow-blinded for several days he managed to fashion snow-shoes out of the saddlery and make the five hundred miles afoot. But he always insisted that prospecting and placer-mining were "too much like work" to appeal to him.

The Contents greeted Williamson warmly, for he had befriended them with excellent advice on their arrival in the new country. Content senior rather querulously added:

"Time you was showing up, Ned. We are about to start."

"Time ain't any particular object to me," slowly replied Williamson. "All I reckon on is to git west of the Rockies before snow fills the passes. 'Fraid we won't have another open Winter like the last. Been curious to look over that Gallatin country. Level 's a floor and big enough to hold some of the small Eastern States. What you got in the wagon?"

"Mostly potatoes and turnips. A little

rye. Some two thousand pounds in all," said Content senior.

"Oughter git a good price for 'em. When I quit Alder Gulch flour was selling for twenty-eight dollars gold for the hundred pounds. That means fifty-six dollars in greenbacks. It'll go to a dollar a pound. They'll be keen to snap up anything that grows. S'pose you're glad to go to town, young man?"

Beach, impatient to mingle with men, to hear the babble of the camp, to witness whatever life Virginia or Nevada City had to offer, suppressed his enthusiasm and admitted his readiness to start. His father took the shotgun and climbed to the seat. Josette lightly scrambled up beside him. Beach and Williamson rode ahead.

"If I was foot-free like you are I'd do some tall prospecting," said Beach when they were beyond hearing of his father and sister.

"What good would gold do me? I ain't going back East. What if I found a mountain of it? Then I'd have to fight to keep from gitting robbed; probably would be wiped out. No sense in digging gold to throw away to card-sharps, or on whisky. Four out of every five prospectors fail to make grub wages. I have all I want and take life easy. Planning to git in with some survey party and travel around a bit."

"I'd like to find a rich placer!" cried Beach.

Then ruefully—

"Only I'll never have the chance till ever' placer's been taken."

Williamson eyed him curiously and thoughtfully tugged at the long hair which the September wind was whipping over his shoulders. After a few minutes of silence he said:

"I may be doing you a bad service, but I'll tell you something. When I was nosing around this Summer north of the Forks I camped for a night on the Prickly Pear. Stopped just long enough to have a squint at the valley. Reckon there's a heap of gold up there. Just stubbed round enough to turn up lots of colors. No sign of any one ever being there. Best place to look is 'way up at the head of a little gulch that runs off the west side of the valley.

"I'm much obliged to you, Ned!" cried Beach. "If I strike anything I'll remember you handsome."

"Don't need to. I was there and left it. I knew it was there before I struck the creek. John Silverthorne told me about it last Winter in the Bitterroot Valley. He found it three or four years ago, but the Blackfeet run him out. Silverthorne was the first miner in the Rockies. Had the picking of everything up here. He took dust to Fort Benton in fifty-seven and had hard work to git Alexander Culbertson to trade him supplies for it. He called his dust a thousand dollars.

"If it hadn't been for Clerk Ray," the older man went on, "Culbertson wouldn't have traded. Even then he was afraid he'd got the worst of it and charged it to his private account. After the dust was minted and found to be worth fifteen hundred dollars Alex was keen to find John and learn where he got the stuff; but John was gone. So you see I got it second-hand, and John ain't thought enough about it to go up there and locate."

Beach thanked him again and for a mile or two was lost with his visions of making a bonanza strike. Throwing off the spell with an effort, he remarked—

"Virginia City must be lively these days."

"Two or three hundred people coming in every day. New people. Friend of mine who was just looking over the country told me that six weeks ago there was a hundred and fifty wagons waiting at the Snake River ferry, and that there was four hundred more strung out behind them on the Utah Road. That's traveling, I reckon."

"It can't be as bad about the road-agents as some folks say."

"Make it twice as bad as all you ever heard and then you'll be below the truth," gravely answered the mountain-man. "When a man can be shot to death in a shaving-chair without stopping the work of shaving the men in the other chairs, it must be pretty bad. That happened when I was there for supplies before starting on the Gallatin trip. They got so they'll call a man to the door in the day-time and make him hand over. Sheriff Plummer don't seem to be able to stop it. Reckon he bit off more'n he can chaw when he agreed to be sheriff for both Bannack and Virginia City. George Ives had a row with George Carthart in the street and shot him dead. Nothing done about it."

"But they say Carthart was a bad one."

'Mebbe that's why Plummer didn't bother Ives. Charlie Reeves fired into a camp of friendly Injuns near Bannack, just to see how many he could kill with one shot. They tried him in a miners' court and let him go. Good way to make Injuns like you! And, speaking of Injuns, just wait. Things have been piling up that they want squared off. I look for trouble this season. The Sioux are stirred up because they know trains will soon be coming through the Big Horn country. Crows are making killings on the Gallatin and Yellowstone. The Blackfeet are trying to block the Mullan Road and threaten to wipe out the camps down this way.

"Haze Lyon, down in Bannack, made a good haul at cards, and when asked to pay a four-hundred-dollar board-bill he shoved his gun under the man's nose and told him to dust out," added Williamson. "Wonder he didn't use a bowie on him! But worst of all was the killing of John Dillingham, the deputy sheriff in Virginia, last month. Haze Lyon, Buck Stinson and Charlie Forbes shot him down in cold blood. They were tried and set free. That Dillingham had metal!"

"Plummer's got metal, too," Beach broke in. "You can hardly blame him if the miners' court turned the men loose. We met Plummer in Bannack when we came through last Spring. Mighty fine-appearing man. Didn't he shoot Jack Cleveland, and wasn't Cleveland a bad lot?"

"That's right. He wiped Jack out mighty handsome. But the two of 'em came to Bannack together. Thick as could be."

Beach frowned as he pondered over this reply. At last he demanded:

"Just what do you mean, Williamson? You admit that Plummer has plenty of grit; then you say other things, but hide your real meaning."

Williamson glanced about as if fearing he might be overheard, then whispered:

"It may be all bosh in your mind, but quite a lot of folks in Virginia and Nevada City are gitting the notion Plummer closes his eyes when the toughs carry on and that when he opens his eyes he finds some strange gold in his pockets. I'm just mentioning it. I'm dusting out of the country. It ain't nothing to me."

"Good Lord! Why, Plummer was as polite and nice as could be when he saw him. Wanted us to eat dinner with him. Had turkey from Salt Lake City that cost him fifty dollars apiece. I called him a perfect gentleman. Josey talks about him still."

"Uh-huh. She's your sister. She's only a child. Pretty's a posy. You'll be mighty fussy about the man she gits to powwowing about."

"Think I'm a fool?" was the hot retort. "Joe's only a kid. Scarcely quit playing with dolls. Let me catch a man even looking at her!"

And he frowned and tapped the big Colt significantly.

"I'm just telling you things I hear," murmured Williamson. "And I never 'lowed to shoot off my mouth till I was clear of the country—too many ears open and too many tongues ready to carry my talk to where it wouldn't do me any good. But I've taken a shine to the little gal.

"It's a bad mess in Alder Gulch and on Grasshopper Creek," he went on. "They held up a man in Biven's Gulch, ten miles from Virginia. In the day-time, mind you. Didn't even wear hankers over their faces. Come to town and blew in the dust and made a joke about it. Perhaps Plummer didn't know anything about it. If so, then he's the only man in town with his ears plugged up. But you keep your trap closed and you won't git into trouble. After you've sold your truck and outfit don't brag about it."

"I won't make any fool talk," Beach promised.

"Your father'll have to hide the gold mighty cute to git it out of the country. Mebbe I can fix up a bag of fool's gold for him to fork over when the stage is held up."

"You speak as if the stage is sure to be held up," gasped Beach.

"Gorrimighty, yes! That is, unless all the road-agents is took sick at the same time. Why, those critters have some kind of game by which they tag a man who's carrying any dust. Fifty or a hundred miles away he's nailed. And what they can't steal they'll spoil. It's nothing for Haze Lyon or Reeves to drink without paying, and then see how many bottles they can bust off the shelf with six shots apiece, the loser ordering more drinks without paying. But that's just their play."

"If things are as bad as you tell, why doesn't some one raise a row?"

"Waiting for a leader. There are men willing to lead, but they want to be sure that when they start they'll have some one behind them to back them up. But it can't go on. I'll be over the mountains when it happens; but the time's surely coming when the men in these gulches will git up on their hind legs and howl for raw meat. Once they git started they'll make a clean sweep."

A SHRILL, ululating cry in the rear caused the two men to halt and look back. Josette was waving her hand. Two horsemen were rapidly approaching the wagon from the east and obviously had caused the girl to signal.

Williamson and Beach cantered back to meet the wagon. The strangers came up at the same time. Unlike the majority of miners, who allowed their beards to grow long and wild, these two were smooth-shaven except for mustaches and chin whiskers. Their flannel shirts were set off by neckties tied in sailors' knots. One of them, a powerful man, directed a leering gaze at Josette.

"Making for Virginny, I take it," he said.

"Aiming that way," coldly replied Content senior. "But we travel slow."

"What you hauling?" broke in the other man.

Beach demanded—

"What's that to you?"

The big man scowled at him and asked—

"Who might you be, younker?"

"I'm one of this outfit."

"And afraid to tell what you have in the wagon," said the big man with a laugh.

"It's no secret," hastily spoke up Content senior, afraid for his son. "We have potatoes and turnips."

"You act as close-mouthed as if you was freighting dust," growled the big man.

"We have a right to be close-mouthed about our own business," said Beach warmly.

Williamson pressed against his knee for him to be silent. The big man stared at him ominously and muttered:

"Time your comb was cut. Folks don't talk that way to the 'Wild Cat.' "

"Keep shut," whispered Williamson as Beach was about to reply.

Beach caught the imploring glance of his father and refrained from speaking. The strangers were now in a nasty mood. The leader rolled out an oath and loudly proclaimed:

"There's too much stealing going on this part of the country. We'll have to look into that wagon."

This was too much for young Content. Almost before he had sensed his purpose he had driven his horse close to the big man's mount and was sighting along the big Colt and warning him—

"Touch that wagon cover and we'll bury you right here."

There was a click of another gun, and Williamson was covering the second man with his rifle. Content senior fished out the shotgun and presented it as an additional argument for the strangers to suppress their curiosity. The one called the Wild Cat exchanged glances with his companion and yanked his horse about and galloped back east. As the two receded from the road Content senior complained—

"Now you've put your foot in it, son."

"Time some one taught those thieves to be careful," mumbled Beach.

"I'd rather there hadn't been any words," said Williamson. "Still, mebbe it's the best way."

And his gaze lingered for a moment on the startled face of Josette.

"They don't seem to be taking the Virginia road, and we won't be bothered again on the way there. Reckon we'll be all right anyway. No use worrying till trouble comes."

"I ain't worrying over me and Josette. I'm fussed about Beach. No knowing what they'll do to him after we've quit Virginia City," groaned Content senior.

Beach tried to make his laugh sound unconcerned as he declared:

"I'm too small game. Not worth troubling, or robbing. Let's be jogging on."

CHAPTER II

GOLD DICK GOES HOME

THE alders that fringed the banks of the creek and gave the gulch its name had vanished when William Fairweather, in early Spring, idly tested the gravel and found thirty cents' worth of gold in the first pan and a dollar and seventy-five cents in the second pan. Since John R. Dittes erected the first house in the gulch Virginia City had grown like a weed, and now there were more than four hundred structures of logs and rough boards. Even willow boughs had been used in making shelters, including a large one of the wickiup type, which was used for gambling.

The gulch itself was floored with boulder drift. It varied in width from an eighth to a half-mile and had its walls patched with black basalt. From the southern slope of Old Baldy, the highest elevation in the limestone wall at the head of the gulch, flowed Alder Creek, its course for seven miles, or until it reached Virginia City, being northerly, then turning to the northwest and west for ten miles to empty into the Passamari, as the Indians called the Stinkingwater. Sand, gravel, boulders and hastily constructed habitations gave the gulch a raw appearance, with the ridge of limestone jealously blocking any view of the Madison Valley.

Ancient erosive forces had patiently worked to strip large areas of the gulch down to its metamorphic beds so they might grind up these exposed surfaces and free the precious metal originally imprisoned there. In this narrow compass Virginia City, and, three miles away, Nevada City, had stretched toward each other until they formed one long straggling street. The two towns would soon boast of ten thousand population.

From the main gulch extended at right angles various smaller gulches, which were being converted into streets as fast as prospectors could pan out paying color. A great change since the eon-old sea had covered all but the mountain peaks, and strange monsters had died and left their bones for the pigmies of 1863 to unearth with blasting-powder, pick and shovel.

There were three routes to the outside world. One went by the way of Fort Benton, the head of navigation on the Missouri during a few weeks of favorable weather.

Early in the Spring, about the time Fairweather's curiosity was aroused by an outcropping of bed-rock in Alder Gulch, a *bateau* loaded with miners and hundreds of thousands of dollars in gold, the reward for placer mining in the Beaverhead country, floated down the winding water road to the States. Those who waited for a steamer to make the fort paid a hundred and fifty dollars for the outward trip and were often delayed many days by sand-bars and other hazards of the mighty river. Those who elected to reach the new diggings by steaming up the river ran the risk of being set ashore because of low water many miles below Benton.

More favored was the five-hundred-mile wagon road to Salt Lake City—approximating the route of the Oregon Short Line of later days, while those bound for the Pacific Coast had choice of the Salt Lake and old emigrant road to California, or the Mullan Road in the north.

But despite these three routes there was no settled route of travel, nor any satisfactory channel of trade. With from eighteen to thirty cents a pound added to freight rates for land transportation, with Oregon and California competing against Chicago and Eastern points to control the trade privilege, freight arrived on an eccentric schedule. And yet in face of all obstacles nearly three hundred people poured into Alder Gulch each day, many to scatter on finding all desirable placers taken up. And day after day the freight trains rolled in.

The newcomers found no churches and no schools in Virginia City, nor did they find any Sabbath in all that now comprises the proud State of Montana. There was a rough board court-house in Virginia City, and bandits with brazen contempt robbed their victims in saloon and street.

However, if law and order and outward forms of piety were lacking, there was one thing that compensated for all hardships of the overland journey. There was gold. No empty guessing along the eastern border of the Rockies in sixty-three. It was the birthplace of gold. Ten miles of auriferous ground in Alder Gulch alone was to yield that year eight million dollars, taken almost entirely by pan and rocker. So rich were the placers that the gulch was destined to yield thirty millions by the end of the third year, and sixty millions at the end of twenty years. Uninviting in appearance, with nothing to tempt the tiller of the soil or the hunter, this narrow corridor, half-choked with alluvial drift, held treasure sufficient to satisfy a Midas. So for a time men forgot the Seventh Day and plunged for gold.

In mining history as a rule the placers are first exploited, then the quartz, and then silver. In the Grasshopper and Alder Creek districts gold and silver were discovered at the same time, while vein-mining possibilities were observed at an early date. A steam quartz mill of six stamps, made on the spot, was already in operation in Bannack City, and frantic efforts were being made to freight mills in for other localities.

Ordinarily the gold of a certain locality adheres to a certain standard of fineness, purity and form. But in this wonderful region Nature gave lavishly in form as well as in quantity. It was panned out in flattened and oval and rounded shapes. It was found in arborescent and crystalline forms. It was discovered as gold wire, with cubes of galena strung upon it. It was taken out in crystals that adorned cubes of iron pyrites. It was recovered in threads and sponge-shaped masses.

It was found with eight faces, and with twelve. Less frequently it occurred in simple cubes. Not only was it taken from igneous and metamorphic rocks, but also from micaceous slates, from boulder drift as well as from gravel. It was infiltrated into lead and iron, in hornblende and granite, as well as in clay and quartz. It seemed to be everywhere and in quantities enough for every one. In a like prodigality silver also was obtained in many forms and colors.

No wonder that the eager mobs thronging the gulch should be as many-faced as any dodecahedron of the yellow metal! No wonder the thieves of the world should flock to such a harvest!

The first gold rush to Idaho, over the mountains, was largely by men from the South and Southwest, or their descendants. Here on the east side of the Rockies the Northern States furnished as many gold-hunters as did the Southland, if not more. Thus political sentiment was more evenly divided than in the Boise Basin. As the draft in the South bore heavily on those who did not care to go a-soldiering, more and more men from below the line made the diggings. There was an anti-Administration sentiment, just as there was west of the mountain, only Northern men in Alder Gulch were not afraid to raise their voices in argument and refutation. Kansas boys, with the stirring Border Ruffian Days fresh in their memory, rubbed elbows with gaunt-featured New Englanders. Men with soft, drawling voices talked with those with a burr in their tongues, fresh from the Empire State. They discussed, they fought, but each learned something from the other.

WHEN the Content freight wagon gained the corral close by the Virginia Hotel there were, perhaps, one hundred women in Virginia City. Josette, vastly excited, laughed in shrill glee as a circle of "old-timers"—those who had reached the gulch in June or before—made game of an Eastern boy who was carrying an umbrella. Her brother, with dancing eyes, took sartorial notes of the crowd nearest the wagon. Some, who had not taken to buckskin, had "foxed" the seats and knees of their trousers with that material, but the greater number had been contented to patch their trousers with flour sacks, and quaintly advertised "Excelsior" or "Superior" and other popular brands whenever they turned their backs.

The wagon had barely halted before the entrance to the corral before a man bustled from the hotel and declared bruskly:

"I'm Carlton, proprietor. From the window I thought I saw vegetables in the hind end of your wagon."

"Potatoes, turnips, and ten or twelve bushels of rye," said Content senior.

"I'll take them. Drive up to the door. My men will unload."

"The price ain't been fixed," said Content.

"Ask forty cents a pound for everything," Ned Williamson whispered to Content.

"Fix it! Fix it!" urged the proprietor. "I'm very busy just now. My men are waiting to unload."

"Forty cents a pound for everything."

"Drive ahead. We'll have you unloaded in a jiffy. Come inside and watch the weight."

"Dust!" said Williamson over the wheel.

"Of course that means gold, not greenbacks," answered Content.

"I was afraid it did," sighed the proprietor. "Well, you've sold out. Come inside."

Leaving Beach and Williamson to sit their horses and watch the wagon, Content hobbled into the hotel. Four men ran out and began carrying the produce inside and to the back of the building. When Content senior did reappear he was rubbing his hands gleefully.

"We made it an even two thousand pounds. Eight hundred dollars, or sixteen hundred in greenbacks. Treasury notes can't go any lower and sometime must be back to a hundred cents on the dollar. I took the paper money. Easier to carry."

"Softly, softly," warned Williamson.

Lowering his voice, Content further informed them that Carlton had bought the horses and wagon at a good figure. To Beach he whispered:

"I left two hundred gold with Carlton for you. Say the word and you shall go through to Salt Lake with us."

"I stick here, dad. If I change my mind I'll work my way with a freight and make a few dollars in doing it."

"Hark! What's that?" cried Josette.

The four of them heard it, the loud roar of many voices. It was up the gulch but rapidly drawing nearer. Beach feared lest some tragedy was about to be enacted and urged Josette to go into the hotel, but she hung back. Soon men came cheering and tossing their ragged hats. And other men were cursing and snarling and spitting oaths and keeping their hands close to their belts. Then the head of a parade came in sight.

The Contents were puzzled to observe the rancor stirred up among some of the spectators on beholding a short, fat man with flaring whiskers, who walked ahead of the procession with mincing steps, one hand resting on his hip, the other brandishing a newspaper. The men marching behind him kept shouting in unison:

"Read it! Read it!"

"Lies! Lies! Dirty Northern lies!" howled the spectators.

"War news," explained Williamson. "Rebs don't like it."

The man with the paper marched to the freight wagon and climbed up so as to balance himself on the wheel, his trousers proclaiming his partiality to "Gilt Edge Flour." In a deep, booming voice he proclaimed—

"I have here a copy of the *New-York Try-bune*."

"Yah-ah! Yankee! Yankee! Lies! Lies!" hooted one section of the crowd.

"Read it! Let the Johnnies hear the truth!" screamed a white-haired man.

The speaker hitched up his belt and with a final flourish of the paper began—

"It contains a report of a great battle fought in the beginning of July at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania."

"You're a liar, you skunk! I'm from Pennsylvany, and there ain't no fighting there!" bellowed an infuriated listener.

"The *Try-bune* says the Rebs was everlastingly licked by the Yankees and that old Lee is toe-nailing it back to the cotton-fields!"

A rock smashed against the side of the wagon. Some one screamed—

"Don't hurt the little gal!"

The fat man dropped to the ground to find shelter. The mob was suddenly subjected to a cleavage as men crowded forward to defend the herald, or to assault him.

"Lee is licked! Lee is licked!" howled Union men.

"Lies! Greeley's paper prints nothing but lies!"

"What do you fellers from the left wing of Price's army know about it? You started running at the battle of Pea Ridge and never stopped till you got up here!"

The Southern men retorted in kind. There came the metallic warning of guns being cocked. Ned Williamson told Josette—

"Get down and hustle into the hotel."

As the frightened girl started to obey the mountain-man loudly warned the crowd—

"There's a little gal here that you want to be mighty careful not to hurt with any of your foolishness."

"Look out for the gal! Don't hurt the gal!"

Men craned their necks and beheld Josette climbing down from the wagon. In the lull which followed, some one, a natural diplomat, called out:

"Every one follow me and licker up to whatever he thinks is right. Too dry for talking or fighting. Spill whisky and save blood."

Some one laughed. There was a surge toward the hotel. The peacemaker walked ahead. Revolvers were thrust back into belts; knives were concealed. Some one called for a cheer in honor of their host. The cheering became general, and after a bit more hesitation the men marched into the hotel barroom, two by two.

Beach and Williamson followed the crowd, the former curious to watch the scene, the latter desirous of assuaging his thirst.

The man who had acted as peacemaker stood at the head of the bar, his trousers in tatters where not patched by bagging, his hair long and ragged, his whiskers in a luxuriant tangle. Black sprouts of hair stuck through holes in the hat, but his bearing was jovial. Smashing his hat down on the bar, he loudly ordered the bartenders to consider all men present his personal friends and worthy of the best liquid cheer the house could produce.

"Don't care if drinks is a ounce apiece. I'm paying for 'em," he shouted. "I'm going out to-morrow, back to Ohio. I can buy enough rum to drown you all and still have enough gold left to buy the best farm in old Ohio. Every one forgit this war talk and fill 'em up."

Beach knew the man was drunk.

Generous applause greeted the wide invitation, and the speaker was taken at his word. Beach was surprized that such a tatterdemalion should be granted extensive credit. He waited till Williamson had finished talking to a citizen and then whispered—

"Fellow looks like a tramp."

"It's 'Gold Dick.' Just made another strike. The third this season. Claims he can smell gold. Blew in the other two finds, but this one is a buster. Don't go by a man's clothes. Only the gamblers and some of the road-agents dress fine. He's been living rough, but he's packed in enough gold to keep him in rum and farms the rest of his life."

Gold Dick banged his glass on the bar, stared truculently at the bearded faces and said:

"Folks been telling me I'll have trouble gitting my dust to Salt Lake. I told 'em to leave that to me. If any man with a blanket over his head tries to hold this galoot up he's going to find he's bit off a chunk of rank p'izen.

"Yes, sir! Gold Dick can smell out gold. And he can smell out any cuss that's took to roadin'. Mebbe some agents are here in this room, drinking my whisky. They're welcome, for it's the most they'll ever git out of me, Gold Dick. Yes, sir! I've lived rough and tough. I've rassled with bears. I've licked Blackfeet. No skunk of a thief can fill his pockets out of my pockets."

And he paused to stare belligerently around.

"That's the talk. Give 'em ——!" piped up a man at the opposite end of the bar.

Then he looked confused, tried to laugh with unconcern and fell to studying his empty glass; for his speech had made him the focus of all eyes. Nearly every face was smothered with a beard, and the effect of the concentrated gaze was much the same as if the men were peering at him over the edge of a handkerchief, or through the folds of a blanket. Then gradually the men began a furtive study of their immediate neighbors.

Gold Dick was not so far gone in liquor as to miss the tension created by his bold defiance. But unlike the fellow down the bar his spirit remained high and disdainful. Waving for the bartenders to fill the glasses, he cried:

"You all act scared. Is a road-agent's bullet any more deadly then one from my old gun? Road-agent got any more simon-pure sand than Gold Dick has? If he has then why don't he quit loafing in town and strike out alone and bring back his pile?

"Easier to git mine from me? That's what you're thinking, but I'll fool 'em. My hands won't ever go clawing for clouds just because some skunk tells me to put 'em up. No, sir! If every decent man in Virginny City would show a little gumption we'd have a bigger burying-ground and fewer stealings. But it's dry talking."

"Let's get out," murmured Beach.

He worked his way to the other end of the long room, where a half-partition shut off the view of the bar. There he found his father and sister talking with the proprietor. Carlton greeted him with a nod, and, leaning over the short counter, said:

"We've been talking about the best way for your father to get his money through. No one knows he took paper instead of gold. That'll help some maybe. And no one knows I've bought his outfit. But they all think he has eight hundred in gold, and the chances are they'll make a try for it. If he makes no resistance he won't be hurt."

"Then the stage is sure to be held up?" asked Beach.

"I'm afraid so. A man can get big odds if he wants to bet it won't be. Hum—let me think a moment. Ned Williamson is going through tomorrow, you say—why, I believe it'll be easy to fool them. Let Williamson take the money and start tonight. He can swap horses at Bannack and can easily keep ahead of the coach until he reaches the Snake ferry. There he can wait till the coach comes up when he can hand back the money.

"The agents won't bother to take a chance holding *him* up. They know he hasn't panned out any dust, and they'd be afraid of the fight he would make. Then tomorrow morning, Mr. Content, you and your daughter can start in the coach with your mind free of worry. I'll book the two of you tonight when the Peabody & Caldwell agent comes in. That's the Bannack coach. At Bannack you can shift to Oliver's Salt Lake coach."

"What do you think, Ned? Care to do it?" asked Content anxiously.

"Good idea. You give me the money before you go to bed. I'll look the town over and sneak off," readily agreed the mountain-man.

"I'll hand it to you," said the proprietor. "He wanted me to keep it for him. I'll take out enough for the two fares and pay the agent. All you have to do is to take things easy and say nothing about selling the outfit. If any one wants to buy it say you've left it with me to sell. Now you all had better go in and eat; there will be a crowd later."

"And they never miss holding up a coach?" asked Beach, refusing to believe every coach was robbed with the people meekly submitting.

"Oh, not every coach," said the proprietor. "One in a while one gets through. The express agent at this end buys drinks for the house whenever that happens. But tomorrow won't be one of the exceptions. Gold Dick has booked for the trip, and he's shot off his mouth too much. He has a rich pile with him, and they're sure to make a try for it. He'll take Jack Oliver's through coach. That's why it's better for you to take the local. If Dick is robbed between here and Bannack, as is likely, you'll escape that much."

Beach insisted that he be allowed to ride through with his father and sister as far as Bannack City, but Content senior wisely refused to permit this.

"Nothing will happen to us," he assured. "I am a cripple and Josette is only a child. If we're held up they'll find nothing on me beyond a few ounces of gold. I'll say I sent my money by express. Now let's eat. Josette is tired and must get to bed."

They proceeded to the dining-room with its two long tables and were soon served. They were finishing the meal when the crowd from the barroom trooped in, Gold Dick leading and proclaiming that all hungry and thirsty human beings in Virginia City were his guests for the night. In one hand he carried a bottle of whisky.

The men were noisy but good-natured. All sectional differences seemed to have been forgotten. Gold Dick stood at the head of the table until all were seated and offered to wager a large sum that he would take his gold from the country, all outlaws to the contrary notwithstanding. He was loudly applauded. One man won a laugh by shouting—

"If the agents don't git it the toll-roads and toll-ferries will."

Before the Contents and Williamson could leave the table a man entered, walking briskly, and Josette whispered—

"Oh, it's Mr. Plummer!"

SHERIFF PLUMMER, tidily dressed and looking the gentleman, came directly to their table and thrust out both hands, one for Content senior and one for Josette, and greeted them genially.

"Carlton told me you were in here. Glad to see you. How charming Miss Josette is looking! Ranching agrees with her. How is the young man and Ned Williamson?" As he shook hands with them Beach found Williamson's innuendoes rapidly becoming ridiculous. He refuted the mountain-man's hints in his mind almost before he had finished sustaining the cordial gaze of one of the most suave villains who ever decorated the annals of criminal history.

Nor did Williamson's bearing suggest any suspicion of the sheriff's probity. His lean and weathered face was twisted in a wide grin. They stood and chatted for a few minutes before Content announced that he and his daughter were leaving on the morning stage.

"Don't blame you. It's a long trip, and one should get across the Snake before rough weather sets in. But I wish you could have stayed for a few days. I'd like to entertain you and show Miss Josette what placer-mining is like, and have her find a nugget or two to remember us by."

"I'd like it," she shyly confessed.

"Of course you would, young lady. It's just as natural for a woman to like gold as it is for those fellows over there to like whisky, and road-agents to be partial to a loaded coach. By the way, Mr. Content, I advise you to hide your dust. I can't be everywhere, and while I hope the coach will go through without any trouble there's always a chance of a hold-up. If I could get twenty or thirty deputies—men I could trust—I'd soon put a stop to it."

"I haven't enough dust to do any worrying over," sighed Content. "I'll risk it by express."

From the other table Gold Dick's voice rose to a vibrant pitch as he scornfully demanded:

"Why don't your sheriff ride on the coaches and git acquainted with some of these road men?"

Plummer's trim figure became the target for all eyes. He smiled tolerantly, nodded to the Contents, and murmured:

"I must leave you and have a talk with Dick. Quite a character, but he's been playing the fool all day. If the coach is held up tomorrow it'll be because of his wagging tongue. Perhaps I can hold him over for a day or two and sneak him out on a horse. I'll try to see you this evening. I've a little something for Miss Josette to make up for those nuggets she won't have time to find."

With a smile and a gracious bow he left them and walked to the next table. Bending over Gold Dick, he talked softly in his ear. At first Dick repudiated all advice and defiantly swallowed more whisky. Plummer rested a hand on his shoulder and continued to talk, his voice so low that none might hear. Gradually Gold Dick's reckless gaze changed. He became thoughtful, and finally nodded his head and mumbled:

"Reckon you're right, Henry. But I just wanted to have one more bit of fun with the boys."

"Addressing the curious table, he announced with drunken gravity:

"Henry's my friend. I ain't so thick-headed or drunk that I don't know a good talk when I hear it. He's give me a good talk. One more drink and one for Henry, and I'm going to a room and sleep off the rum."

"You can have a room right here," said Plummer. "I'll tell Carlton to fix you up. Good evening, boys."

Overtaking the Contents at the door he shook his head and sighed:

'If the men wouldn't get drunk and tell every one how rich they have struck it! What chance has a fellow like Dick to carry a fortune back to Ohio?" he added. "He'll live with the bottle all the way and be forever bragging about his pile. If he isn't robbed before he crosses the mountains he'll be robbed in Salt Lake City. If by any miracle he gets started from Salt Lake then he'll lose his gold on the way East, or after he's struck the States."

He secured Carlton's attention and said:

"You already know these are my friends. The little lady will want the quietest room you have, a corner room, with her father and brother in the next. Then better have a room or two vacant. Put Dick up where he can sober off."

Turning to Josette, who was looking very sober and standing close by her father, he said:

"You're just as safe here as you would be on a farm back East. The boys are noisy at times, but they wouldn't annoy you for the richest placer in the gulch. The worst they'll do when in liquor is to try to sing, make a speech, dance or shoot a gun through a window."

Josette quickly reacted under his humorous assurance and was all smiles. He continued:

"Now I'm going to fetch that keepsake for you."

He strode from the hotel, leaving Beach more convinced than ever that Williamson's veiled remarks had done the sheriff an injustice.

Josette was anxious to go outside and see the town by night, but after one look through the window at the small mobs of men passing up and down the street, profanely airing their political differences or indulging in drunken exuberance, her father refused to permit it. She was still pouting and inclining to tears, and protesting that their early departure would prevent her from getting more than a fleeting glimpse of the lively settlement when Plummer returned. From a side pocket of his sack coat he produced a necklace of gold wire strung with tiny nuggets of the precious metal. He dropped it over Josette's head and declared that it was most becoming.

"But," he warned, "don't be wearing it tomorrow."

It was Josette's first piece of jewelry, and she hugged down her chin to observe the effect. She was immensely pleased and correspondingly thankful. After she had expressed her appreciation she felt bold enough to say:

"Daddy doesn't want me to go out on the street. I don't like to be cooped up in here. I wanted to see something of Virginia so I can talk about it in Salt Lake."

Plummer pursed his lips and glanced humorously at Content senior.

"Parents should always be obeyed," he solemnly remarked. "But if your father will feel safe with the sheriff as your guide and guard I'll be glad to take you for a walk. Rough and noisy, but not dangerous.

You'll see nothing you can't see from the window here.

"The surface indications are worse than the reality. The boys have to do something to relieve the montony of gulch work. All they seem able to find for enjoyment is to get drunk and hoot. But we won't be bothered. Your brother and Ned Williamson will want to take some exercise, too."

"Well, sheriff, we'll all go," decided Content senior. "Only I'll make poor time walking."

They took to the crowded street with Josette between her father and the sheriff. Williamson and Beach walked behind them. The gulch seemed to be filled with men, for wherever there was a patch of light from store or saloon there was a mass of bearded faces. In the darker areas was the same congestion. Night was playtime for the miner tired of his lonely work or the prospector just returned from a long tramp through the maze of unnamed ridges and cañons. There were young and old, ambitious and slothful, the sober and the drunken, the timid and the reckless.

Practically every man wore a revolver or two, or a big knife. If a belt showed no weapon it invariably could be accepted as a fact that the bootleg was serving as sheath or holster.

Near the hotel they passed an open booth where a young man was selling footgear as fast as he could rip open the boxes. Josette noticed that some men were buying shoes for their wives and daughters.

"Young Dan Weston, first fellow to bring boots and shoes into Bannack and Virginia," remarked Plummer. "Mighty fine chap."

And he exchanged greetings with the enterprising merchant.

They were held up for a minute by men entering a large, uncouth structure made of willow boughs and a few rough boards. Through the opening they could see men clustered thickly around several tables, and could hear the bags of gold thumping down on the tables as the miners sought excitement in playing against the bank games.

"This was the place where John Dillingham's body was brought after he was murdered by Lyon, Stinson and Forbes," Williamson whispered to Beach.

As they were waiting for the stream of men to thin out so they could pass on, Beach learned that there were those in Virginia City who were convinced of Plummer's relations with the outlaws; for out of the darkness a voice cried:

"Does this place make you think of the only honest officer we had, Plummer? You packed the jury that tried the murderers."

Plummer dived into the crowd, a long gun appearing in his right hand. The Contents remained before the gambling-place. They heard the sheriff's fierce challenge—

"Step out here and say that, you liar!"

But the invitation was not accepted. The sheriff reappeared, laughing and saying:

"You must overlook it, little lady. There are fools in this town who blame me every time any one is robbed or killed. As if I could know ahead what is to happen and then be in several places at once!"

He treated the incident lightly, but his face was drawn and pale.

"The idea!" scornfully exclaimed Josette as Williamson nudged Beach in the ribs.

They did not walk far beyond the gambling-place before Content senior found the traveling too rough. He decided that he and Josette would return to the hotel. Beach and Williamson wished to explore the town more thoroughly, so, leaving Plummer to escort the two, they continued their wandering.

Men were drinking and men were gambling. But they witnessed no fighting. The belated news of the Gettysburg battle was being hotly discussed by several groups, but as each disputant knew a blow would bring on a mortal combat the discussions were limited to words.

When they reached the saloon and bakery run by Nicholas Kessler the mountain-man decided he wanted a drink. Beach did not drink, but he was glad to enter and study the lively scene.

To his surprize Gold Dick was playing host. He had supposed that the miner was in bed at the hotel, sleeping off his debauch so as to be fit for the morrow's journey. The fumes of liquor seemed to have wiped out the caution engendered by Plummer's advice, and once more he was hurling defiance to all the road-agents east of the Rockies. For good measure he added:

"And right now I'm packing enough mineral on me to make those skunks hang out their tongues and drool. And I'm taking it all back, 'way back to old Ohio. Now everybody have a fresh slug and drink 'to —— with all road-agents.' "

The glasses were filled and emptied, but the ceremony was performed in silence and more for the drink's sake than because of the toast. Men were eyeing each other surreptitiously, and each was wondering how many honest men were in the gathering.

The bartender leaned forward and said something to Gold Dick. The miner threw back his head and roared:

" 'Bad talk' to be making? Bad for who? For honest men to hear? Think I'm scared of the skunks? To —— with all of 'em! that's what I say. Yes, sir! Let 'em take my gold if they can. If they can git it they're welcome. Yes, sir! There is some of it, boys. Now make a play for it, any road-agents within hearing."

And from the blouse of his shirt he pulled out three big bags of what must have been nuggets from the sound they made when thrown on the bar. From his dilapidated coat and trousers he fished out more bags, slamming each down as a challenge.

"—— fool!" muttered one of the men, backing from the bar. "He's going too far."

The bartender stared at Dick helplessly, his eyes very grave. "Better put it up, Dick," coaxed the bartender. "Too heavy to be carrying around. Why not let Mr. Kessler keep it for you till morning?"

"Meaning I ain't man enough to take care of my own mineral?" roared Gold Dick.

Some one laughed at the absurdity of such a notion. Dick glared wrathfully at the bartender, and the latter fell to wiping the bar to indicate he had thoroughly withdrawn from the situation. Mumbling and cursing, the miner replaced the heavy bags and stared malevolently at the bartender.

"Awful dry this Fall," some one lamented.

A burst of laughter followed. Gold Dick grinned broadly, called for more drinks, forgot his animosity and tried to give the bartender one of the small bags.

Williamson quietly took a drink and was waved back when he attempted to pay for it. Leaving the saloon, the two continued their walk to Nevada City. They found this suburb of Virginia to be more quiet, as many of the citizens had gone down the gulch to gather the latest news and enjoy the excitement.

"Now we must be getting back," said Williamson. "I must start soon if I'm to make a good camping-place before morning. I'll need a few hours' sleep."

They walked rapidly for half a mile in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. Then Beach bluntly asked—

"You still think Sheriff Plummer gets some of the stolen dust?"

"Hush! If you was heard to say that your life wouldn't be worth a piece of hardtack."

"That answers my question," muttered Beach.

"I haven't any doubt in the world. But listen, young man; so long as Plummer is pleasant to you, don't you let on you think he's taking pay from the agents. Even a thief can be human enough to have friends. If Plummer uses you well you just keep your mouth shut. You ain't here to do any reforming. Let older heads take care of that. On t'other hand, don't get thick with Plummer so you'll ever be tarred with the same stick.

"Now let's pick up our feet. I must make twenty-five miles before I unroll my blankets."

For the first time in his life Beach felt a touch of homesickness.

"I hate to have you go, Ned," he said.

"Get work. Work hard. If you have time next Spring before your folks come back you can run out to that little gulch on the edge of Prickly Pear Valley. Who knows but what you'll find a barrel of nuggets?"

"Why not I as well as Gold Dick and these other men?" cried Beach, his fancy quick to picture himself making a strike.

On their way to the hotel and after they had passed Kessler's they were surprized to hear the voice of Gold Dick. They stopped and could make out a small group of men. The miner was begging the men not to leave him, a strange contrast to his confident bearing earlier in the evening.

"I'm afraid," they heard him confess. "I ain't afraid of the daylight or anything I can see. But at night—tonight—and the darkness! I seem to hear men whispering behind my back—planning to rob me—or worse."

"You've had too much red liquor. You're seeing things what ain't," gruffly said one of the group. "Come along and walk some of the foolishness out of your head. You ain't et anything since striking camp. Just been guzzling whisky."

"We're yer friends," declared another voice.

"It ain't the drink," protested Gold Dick in a quavering voice. "It ain't that I've lost my sand. But I seen looks passed in Kessler's. Those looks sobered me. It's a knife from behind. The —— skunks! What be I saying? Reckon I do need to walk, keep walking, till I'm dog-tired. Live and let live! I don't hold a grudge ag'in' nobody. I don't want nobody to feel a grudge ag'in' me. I'm off tomorrer with what little dust I've managed to git together. It ain't much."

"He's scared stiff. Good thing for him," whispered Williamson to Beach.

"You've said that over 'n' over. Come along and walk your head clear," insisted one of the vague figures.

"But I lied about my dust. I didn't make no big killing. I ain't got more'n—well, more'n twenty-five or thirty ounces."

Some of the men laughed skeptically, remembering the lavish display on the bar at Kessler's.

"I say I ain't," insisted Gold Dick. "I've been making lots of fool talk. That's all."

And the last they heard of him as he made off in the darkness with his companions was his repeated assertion that he had no fortune in gold and would not be worth the plucking.

"I hope he isn't in bad company," said Beach. "I wonder if we ought to follow him."

"And be treated the same as he treated Kessler's bartender," sneered Williamson. "Inside of ten minutes he'll be talking another strain and telling the road-agents where they can go to and roast. Tomorrow's the time he must watch out. Not tonight. He has only a part of his gold with him. They'll wait till tomorrow when they can make a fat killing.

"Besides," he continued, "I haven't any time to spare. I won't go inside the hotel for fear folks might see me taking leave of your dad and sister. Carlton passed me the paper money before we came out. Your dad knows where the coach will overtake me. My nag's in the corral. Good luck, and take care of your health. Hope to see you next Spring."

They shook hands, and with a less buoyant heart Beach entered the hotel alone.

The proprietor in passing him asked—

"Ned gone?'"

Beach nodded glumly. The proprietor waited on several people and rejoined him, saying:

"He's a fine man. But he has queer notions about mining. Rather no notions at all. Doesn't seem to care for gold. Don't believe he ever washed out a color."

Beach thought of the placer on the edge of Prickly Pear Valley, but said nothing. Carlton next asked—

"Seen anything of Gold Dick?"

Beach told what he had learned on the street. The proprietor looked very grave.

"Too bad!" he muttered. "When Sheriff Plummer came in with your folks he caught Dick trying to sneak away and made him go back to bed. He must have slipped away right after that. Gave him a room at the back of the house and he bolted through the window. He never passed through the office."

"Left his gold with you, I hope."

"Some of it. I tried to get him to leave it all. Plummer tried to get him to leave it with me. But he acted like a madman and tried to pull a gun. Said we were trying to rob him. We had to humor him. Of course he would be all right so long as he stayed indoors. Well, let's hope nothing happens to him. You'll be lonely after your folks are gone."

"Mighty lonely," agreed Beach.

"Get some work. Fill your mind with work."

"Ned Williamson's words."

"Work is the best medicine in the world for loneliness. Keeps one from thinking about things they can't help. No time to go prospecting; sluice-boxes will be frozen inside of a month. Why don't you try Gamble's water-power mill three miles below Nevada City? He gets a hundred and fifty dollars a thousand for lumber, gold. He ought to pay good wages.

"Then there's a man named Holter in Nevada City," Carlton went on. "He's here in Virginia lots. He has a saw-mill in Ramshorn Gulch, eighteen miles from here. Has a lumber-yard in Nevada City and is talking of putting one in here. You might make a deal with him. He's sure to cut under Gamble a bit in price and he'll need a spry young man to go around and take care of the orders while he's out to the mill.

"Now let's see. First thing is a place to stay. I'm crowded, or I'd make you a special price," he explained.

"You've been kind enough. I'll look up a place tomorrow. I'll find some miner who wants to share his cabin with me, for half the shot. I have enough to stake me for a week or two. Before it's gone I'll have work, or be bound for Salt Lake with some freight train. Dad wanted me to take more gold, but I wouldn't."

"You don't need any more. Likely young fellow like you can get work. I'll take you on here and be glad to, but you can probably make better wages outside and like it better. Now let's see— Yes, he'd be a mighty good man to hitch to. X is the man I'm thinking of."

"*X?*" repeated Beach, puzzled.

"John X. Beidler. Every one calls him X. Good man to stop with till you get work. Arrived here soon after Plummer did. Not a big man to look at, but a mighty big one when he gets to going. Came from Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Used to be broom-maker. He has tried several prospecting trips but doesn't seem to be lucky when it comes to mineral. I'll write a line for you to take to him, and you can hunt him up in the morning. You'll like him."

The abrupt entrance of Sheriff Plummer interrupted the conversation. His face was red from running, and his eyes were blazing with excitement.

"Where's that man Williamson?" he demanded of Beach.

"I left him in the street a short time ago," Beach answered, realizing that he must tell the reason of Williamson's departure from the gulch if he told anything.

"I'll bet he's well outside of Virginia City by this time," snapped Plummer. "I must send a deputy to Bannack to head him off. And folks will blame the sheriff as usual."

"Head him off? Isn't he free to go and come as he pleases?" asked Beach.

"He's free. That's the —— of it," was the grim reply. "But it won't please him to come back here; and I want him—bad."

"For what?" spoke up Carlton. "Williamson can't have any disagreeable business with you, Henry."

"I want him for murder. Gold Dick is dead. Cut to pieces. Williamson was seen near Dick. Now he runs away."

"Ned Williamson never killed Dick!" exploded Beach.

"I hope not. But he's gone. Ran away in the night. Did he come in here and tell you, Carlton, or tell Mr. Content, he was leaving town tonight?"

Carlton shook his head. Beach's mind was active in picturing the mountain-man's dilemma if held up and accused of the crime. But it would be difficult to explain how a part of the dead prospector's gold had been changed into paper money, and how the great bulk of it had disappeared.

"It looks bad for him. This kind of work must stop," fumed the sheriff. "Right here in town! Not more'n a dozen feet off the main street! The town is waking up over it. Hear that!"

From up the gulch came the hoarse cry of angry men, the mass-cry of those who seek a victim. It was the first time Beach had heard a mob yell, and it became a terrible beast, something entirely different from anything he had ever seen or heard. It increased in volume and was tossed back and forth by the walls of the narrow gulch.

Then came the shuffling of many feet. He and the others in the office ran to the door.

Improvised torches were bobbing and swaying. The scuffling boots had stirred up a thick dust, and through it the figures of the marchers were revealed but vaguely.

As the procession came abreast of the hotel Beach recognized a big fellow in the lead as the same one who had been inquisitive about the freight wagon's lading; the man called the Wild Cat. He carried a coil of rope. Behind him came two men with a stretcher improvised out of two muzzle-loading Army rifles and a blanket.

Horrified, yet fascinated, Beach stared down into the bloodless face of Gold Dick. His clothing dripped blood. He had been butchered in a devilish manner.

"My God! I feel sick!" Beach muttered.

Carlton took his arm and led him away from the door.

CHAPTER III

BEACH GETS A JOB

SADLY shaken by Gold Dick's death, young Content slept poorly and in the morning felt much disillusioned as to the romantic, adventurous side of camp life. Because Williamson had been of his party he expected to be closely questioned on entering the office, and this anticipation made him nervous. He found the proprietor busily weighing out gold dust for those willing to pay fifty dollars a week for bed and board, and Sheriff Plummer waiting for an interview.

It was with much relief that he observed the sheriff's quick smile and genial bearing. Plummer advanced and thrust out a hand of greeting.

"You look a little down around the gills," he commented.

"I've had a bad night," confessed Beach. "That man's death—and what you said about Ned Williamson, bothered me."

"I can't blame you for liking Williamson. He likes you and your people. But Williamson won't work. He's had a chance to make rich strikes but never took advantage of his wide knowledge of the country. I figure it out that he saw a chance to get a lot of gold easy. The poor, drunken fool put up a fight and Williamson did for him."

As the sheriff talked his jaws clicked together, and the benign expression left his face.

"I don't believe it," said Beach. "If he wouldn't turn his hand to pick up a bushel of gold he certainly wouldn't commit murder for a few bags of it."

Plummer smiled cynically.

"He would never break his back swinging a pick, but he has to have dust to get whisky, food and powder. I agree he won't work for a million; but he'll kill for a dozen ounces."

"No, sir!" emphatically cried Beach.

"Then why should he light out at night without a word to your folks?" asked Plummer.

Beach colored and hesitated. It was on his tongue to tell the true reason, but curious ears were listening to the conversation. Time enough to establish an alibi for the mountain-man after he had taken the package of treasury notes beyond the reach of the banditti, or was captured and accused of the crime. So he replied awkwardly:

"He comes and goes as he takes the notion. He doesn't bother with good-bys. And night travel doesn't bother him any."

"We'll have him before another night," grimly declared Plummer. "Then let him prove his innocence. And, my young friend, think well as you wish of Williamson, but don't talk too much about him here in Virginia City. Say anything you want to, to me; and it's all right. But there are others who wouldn't like it and would be sure to act nasty."

The warning was spoken in so low a tone that none of the listeners heard it. Then to advertise himself as entertaining the same cordial feeling toward the young man, despite his championing the mountain-man, the sheriff again shook him warmly by the hand.

At this point Content senior and Josette entered the room.

IT WAS nearly time for the stage to call at the hotel and start on its outward-bound trip. Carlton urged his guests to lose no time in eating their breakfast, and the three, accompanied by Plummer, hurried to the dining-room.

The sheriff briskly ordered the waiter to bestir himself, and the fellow left other guests to obey. Necessarily the conversation was broken as the four hurriedly ate of the good, if rough, fare. It was Beach's wish that his sister should hear nothing about the murder and the charge made against Williamson. The girl, being in the secret of the mountain-man's night ride with her father's money, asked no questions. Content senior was careful not to introduce the subject, and the sheriff did not mention it.

In a whirl of last farewells, tearful good-bys from Josette and husky admonitions from Content senior, father and daughter clambered into the coach and were off.

The parting had come without Beach being able to speak with his father aside. They were separated so abruptly that the young man's wits were slightly befuddled. He was aroused from his melancholy mood by Plummer's hand clapping him on the shoulder. In a hearty voice the sheriff inquired as to his plans.

More to be alone than from any hesitancy to confide his plans Beach answered—

"I'm going to do some tall thinking; then I'm going to get work."

"Work ought to be plenty," encouraged Plummer. "Two classes of folks here—men who've made their pile and won't work, and those who expect to make their pile and can't afford to work for anybody except Number One. If nothing better turns up I can name you as my deputy. It'll be a grub-stake and something over. The offer stands open. I must be going now."

Beach thanked him and retired to a corner to straighten out his thoughts. He had hungered for the life of a mining-camp. Now he was discovering his capacity for being homesick. For an hour after his father and sister left him even the prospect of finding a hill of gold would scarcely have aroused him from his depression. But deep sorrow or great joy is in a continual flux, and after quite exhausting his forlorn forebodings he rose and went into the street.

Here he expected to find groups of men angrily discussing the murder, with a hostile eye for him, Williamson's companion. He halted near the hotel and wished that Plummer might come along. He felt a strong inclination to retreat to the hotel when he beheld a score of men coming toward him, whooping and yelling. As they advanced, other men ran to join them, coming from stores, saloons and cabins.

Beach fought down the impulse to flee, his hand closing and unclosing on the handle of the big cap-and-ball forty-four Colt revolver. If they were coming to wreak vengeance on him would he offer resistance, or die like a sheep? He did not know, and his uncertainty made him tremulous.

Theoretically he believed a man should go down fighting when beset by odds and bolstered up only by his consciousness of innocence. But he had never harmed a fellow man. To kill in fact was much different from vegetable-farm dreams of reckless bravery. Many times in the potato field he had entertained himself by imagining how he would stoutly face the cruel and greedy. He had created many pictures wherein Beach Content was a hero, and the visualization had softened hours of back-breaking drudgery. But now he did not believe he could lift a hand gainst these ferocious, bearded faces.

His legs grew weak and he sat down on a rock when the foremost man in the howling mob waved something above his head and exultingly crowed:

"Ten ounces! Ten-ounce nugget! I can get a bushel of 'em! Every one in and drink this nugget up!"

SO THIS was the cause of the excitement. Gold Dick, his wealth and his death, were forgotten. The shifting populace, all impelled by the same hunger, had interest only in the living man, and then only when he made a strike.

With a swift revulsion Beach entered the hotel with the exulting mob and stood in the background while the hotelkeeper weighed the nugget. He allowed ten ounces credit although it weighed slightly more than that. The crowd cheered, and the lucky miner was perfectly satisfied as there would be a shrinkage when the gold was cleaned.

"Tell your drink-slinger to give me credit for the full amount. Now, boys, let's see if we can't wet that claim down even if the water is poor in Alder Gulch," cried the miner.

His facetiousness tickled the humor of the crowd and all swept into the barroom.

"That fellow is 'Tin Cup,'" Carlton informed Beach. "I never heard that he had any other name. If you'd gone into the bar you'd have seen him using a tin cup instead of a glass. Always has it hitched to his belt. He's just made a strike in Biven's Gulch, ten miles from here. Instead of sticking by his claim and using what little weather there is left he's footed down here to celebrate."

"And he'll be killed the same as Gold Dick was!" muttered Beach.

Carlton shook his head.

"I don't think so. Tin Cup is shrewd. He'll whoop it up till the ten ounces are spent, then he'll disappear. The first thing the men know he'll be gone."

"But they can follow him."

"But they won't. Tin Cup on a spree is mighty likable. Tin Cup on his claim, even if it's worthless, is poisonous. He can throw lead with the best of them, and they'll never catch him too drunk for action. No; I don't believe any one will get him. He's been in twice before this season, but not with any nuggets like the one I took.

"Now let's take up your case," Carlton went on. "Last night I was advising you to see X—John Beidler. I'm still thinking he's the best man for you to go to."

He wrote a few lines and handed the paper to Beach, saying:

"Beidler's cabin is below Kessler's bakery. About the tenth. Any one can tell you. If he's out you'd better come back here and wait."

On taking to the street Beach witnessed another phenomenon of the mining town. Two hundred men, carrying picks and shovels, or packing them on horses along with blankets and supplies, were hurrying out of the gulch. There was no talk among them, no suggestion of companionship, except as three or four shared the services of one pack-animal.

As they straggled by, each eager to be

first in the quest of new diggings, their eyes beheld nothing of the spectators on both sides of the street, but were staring straight ahead. Some were frantic in their haste to maintain the lead and secure the choicest pickings, and were fairly winded before they were clear of Alder Gulch. The veterans took it more leisurely, confident on passing the van within the first few miles.

Beach stood before the gambling-place made of willow boughs, accosted a man who was indolently paring his nails and who was dressed above the mode of the average citizen, and inquired—

"What's the trouble now?"

The man, sleek of appearance, with mustaches nicely curled, restored his knife to the scabbard inside his brown sack coat, and surveyed Beach sleepily.

"Some chap struck it rich," he lazily drawled. "Came to town to wet down his luck. The procession is hurrying out to his diggings to gobble up everything on both sides of the discovery claim. Half of them won't make the distance at all. Other half will find everything taken. All will be back tomorrow night. They do it every time some fool comes screeching into town to tell of a strike."

BEACH moved on, leaving the gambler to philosophize on the innate foolishness of those who will sweat and toil and then bring most of their earnings to the card tables or the bar. Beach counted the cabins from Kessler's and came to a halt before a small one, twelve by eighteen, with one small window.

The door was open, and he could see a table, made out of a big box, a cupboard and two chairs. The latter were also fashioned out of boxes. Some one was moving about inside, and before Beach could approach the door a genial voice called out—

"Waiting for rain to drive you in, or are you just resting?"

He stepped to the door and discovered a man busily washing a linen duster in a pail.

"I'm looking for John X. Beidler," he said.

"Save your eyesight. You've found him. Come in and sit down. I'll be through in a minute. First time I had this duster washed it cost me two dollars. Since then I've made money hand over fist by washing it myself."

"My name is Beach Content. The hotelkeeper gave me a few lines of writing to make me known to you." And Beach took a box-chair and placed the letter of introduction on the table.

"Your name sounds all right," decided Beidler.

Then he gave the garment a final rub and rinsed it in a pail of clear water. Drying his hands on a coarse towel, he shot a sharp glance at Beach and proceeded to read the letter.

Beach was not impressed by Beidler's physical presentment. He was not more than five feet six in height and looked frail, almost anemic. This first judgment was tempered somewhat as Beidler smiled amiably and extended his hand. The grip was quick, nervous and emphatic, and the man's features expressed a wealth of good nature unspoiled by cynicism.

"Glad to meet you, Content. Carlton says you've been farming. That's a fine life. Think I'd like it. I put you down for a tenderfoot at first. You're looking for work, Carlton says; also a place where you can hang your hat."

"Right. Hotel prices are beyond me."

Then Beach told all that the hotelkeeper had suggested to him. As an afterthought he added—

"And Sheriff Plummer offered to take me on as a deputy-sheriff."

He was rather proud of Plummer's offer and perhaps showed it.

Beidler's round face became thoughtful, and he studied Beach shrewdly.

He slowly observed:

"John Dillingham was an honest deputy. He was murdered, and his three murderers paid no price. I advise you to look about a bit before taking the deputy job. You can come here and stay till you can do better. I don't think you're quite up to being a deputy yet. You're welcome to live here till you find your feet."

"I can pay as I go," Content hastily put in. "When I can't do that I'll quit. I'll be glad to come here if you'll name the terms."

Beidler was reluctant to state precise terms and preferred that the matter of living costs wait for a while. But Content was obdurate; and Beidler at last said:

"Half the grub while you're here. If you're gone for a day or more of course you don't pay for any grub."

Content smiled for the first time since parting from his father and sister.

"Half the grub whether I'm here to eat it or not," he firmly corrected. "Now about the rent of the cabin."

"No, no," stoutly rebelled Beidler. "None of that. I got this shack at a bargain. It's mine. It doesn't cost me anything if you sleep here. When I have to make money that way I'll tie a hanker across my face and take to the road."

This remark brought Gold Dick's death to mind, and Content frankly confessed his worry about Ned Williamson.

Beidler smiled in a peculiar fashion; a smile of the thin lips only.

"Don't you fret," he comforted. "They'll never catch Williamson for the simple reason he never killed Dick. So they can't afford to catch him. They want him to ride wide and stay away so they can say he did for Dick and escaped. If he had in fact taken Dick's gold they'd be chasing him over the mountains and to Salt Lake before they'd let him get away with the stuff."

This remark reflected indirectly on the sheriff and made Beach uneasy. He said—

"Plummer has been very agreeable to me."

"That's Plummer all over. He can be very agreeable to any one—the smooth cuss! I'm not trying to turn you against Henry Plummer. You'll remember I haven't mentioned his name together with any suspicious talk. I will say this: Affairs in this gulch and at Bannack City on Grasshopper Creek are going to take a new turn soon. I don't know just when, but pretty soon something will happen that will jolt us so hard that we'll simply have to turn out, roll up our sleeves and make a clean job of it. Now about yourself.

"You're living here already and will eat here today," Beidler continued. "I'll do the dinner-marketing as I know conditions better than you do. Guess what I'd rather have than anything else for dinner?"

"A good steak of beef."

Beidler made a face.

"Onions," he sighed. "I dream of onions. I've lived on meat so long I begin to feel like an Indian. You're from a vegetable farm and haven't had time to miss them yet. But you will. And bread! Why some of the dealers are beginning to get control of all the flour that comes in, and if they don't run against a bread riot we'll see it a dollar a pound, gold. Between the road-agents and speculators it'll be hard living in Virginia City this Winter unless——"

After waiting a few moments Beach prompted—

"Unless what?"

Beidler hesitated, as if doubtful just how he should finish, then slowly answered—

"Unless conditions change."

Beach knew this was not what his new friend had started to say. Yet he would not press him. Time enough to be admitted to his confidence when they were better acquainted; but he did ask:

"Tell me more about Plummer. Don't be afraid of hurting my feelings. I've only seen him three times in my life—when we came in last Spring, last evening, and this morning. Ned Williamson has hinted at several things."

"I'll tell you only what I know to be facts. The facts will leave his standing in the gulch an unsettled question. I'm free to give the facts, as there are others in Virginia who know them as well, or better than I do. In sizing up a man you have to get behind what he says and the way he looks, and get a look at his background.

"Now I know this about Plummer. He appeared in Nevada City, California, in fifty-two. He showed much spirit, and in fifty-six was made marshal of the town. While serving as marshal he was convicted of stealing the wife of a man named Vedder and of killing Vedder when that gentleman objected. He was sentenced to serve ten years in prison, but he had made friends and was pardoned by Governor Weller on the plea of ill health. Rather hard to beat that, I reckon! He promptly proved his gratitude to the governor by killing another man and holding up a stage. He was acquitted.

"Then he was put in the Mayfield jail for another robbery, and, fearing that his luck wouldn't hold, he broke jail, taking with him another murderer, Jack Cleveland. A short time after his escape notices appeared in the California papers, describing how he had been hung in Washington Territory. Those printed reports stopped all pursuit as they were intended to do. Plummer undoubtedly wrote the notices himself. But I shouldn't have said the last as I can't prove it. Yet I firmly believe it.

"Plummer and Cleveland came to Bannack City last year. They quarreled, and he killed Cleveland. He was acquitted in a miners' court on the ground that Cleveland had used language no man could stand.

"He was elected sheriff in Bannack. An honest man was elected sheriff here. Our man was informed he would live a lot longer if he resigned. He quit. Then Plummer was elected sheriff in his place and is now serving both towns.

"Dillingham, his deputy here, was honest and fearless. He was murdered openly by Deputy Sheriff Stinson, Charlie Forbes and Haze Lyon. The three men were acquitted. There you have Plummer's background.

"Perhaps some of the charges against him in California were exaggereated," Beidler continued.

"I don't believe it. But perhaps some were. Since he has been sheriff for Bannack and Virginia scores of crimes have been committed, scores of men have been murdered, and no one has been punished. He has built a gallows in this town and has repeatedly threatened to use it, but he has hung no one yet.

"Men caught in a crime have been tried before a miners' jury and before a miners' judge, and have been acquitted. I have given you facts that all old-timers know to be facts. Some say Plummer always packs a jury. I believe it, but I can't prove it.

"He can be very smooth and polite and very pleasant. He's made a good impression on you. You will do well to continue treating him as if he was the finest citizen in the gulch. It's very probable that he is honest in showing a liking for you. But there is his background, and it's best you should know it before taking a job as deputy under him."

"I suppose there are other men who have been in difficulties because of their faults, and then have turned out all right," Beach moodily remarked.

"No doubt about that, and you can have that in mind when any one talks like I have. Only there are mighty few here who will talk as freely as I have.

"I'm not boasting when I say they're afraid of Plummer. He has plenty of sand and is a master with a gun. If he was lacking courage you could explain away the lack of convictions by saying he meant well but didn't have enough sand in his craw.

"But he isn't that kind. He isn't afraid of anything. And, knowing what I do about him, I'm convinced he could be a terror to every road-agent in the country if he took the war-path against them."

"I'm much obliged, and I won't repeat anything you've told me. Think I'll go out and look up Holter, the sawmill man."

"Good. You'll find work all right. Wait a minute and I'll trot along with you. I know Holter, and a word won't do you any hurt."

BY THE time Beidler had slipped on a loosely fitting frock coat with huge pockets and a pair of boots much too large for him, and crowned the rather grotesque effect with a huge white slouch hat that any Mexican would have endorsed because of its width of brim, Beach began to feel that he would have preferred to interview Holter alone: In his belt, concealed by the coat, Beidler thrust two Colt forty-fours, and thrust a bowie-knife into one of the flaring bootlegs. He referred to the knife as his "Arkansas toothpick." He looked like a mischievously inclined boy dressed up in his father's clothes.

"What's the good of guns when your coat's in the way?" skeptically asked Beach.

In a flash Beidler had drawn and cocked a gun. Beach blinked his eyes, stared foolishly and muttered:

"I talk too much. Wish I could do that."

"You'll have to be able to do that—and with both hands at the same time—if you ever hope to stop crime as a deputy sheriff," warned Beidler.

"I couldn't do it in a thousand years. My place is on a vegetable farm."

"You can practise in the cabin here where no one will see you," encouraged Beidler. "It's all in the draw. If you can get your gun out first you won't need to shoot in ninety-nine times out of a hundred. The other fellow will quit. Any of us would. And where it depends on the draw you'll be so close to your man you won't need to be a marksman. Shooting straight can be learned after you've learned how to get ready to shoot."

If Beach had any prejudices against his companion's quaint appearance they were soon dissipated when the two walked along the busy street and Beidler was the recipient of many cheerful and respectful greetings. There were some who did not speak to him, but glowered balefully as he passed; but none smiled at the huge hat and flapping coat and flaring boot-tops.

The new friends started for Nevada City, where Holter had a lumber-yard and where Beidler said they would be most likely to find their man. They had covered half the distance when Beidler halted and announced:

"Luck is with us. Here he comes now. Looks mad enough to eat nails, and nails are fetching one hundred and fifty dollars a keg in gold. Poor time to speak to him, but time is money and we can't wait."

He called out a cheerful salutation to Holter, and the latter's frown vanished.

"Glad to see you, X. How's the broom business?"

"Folks up here don't seem to need brooms, let alone wanting them. Shake hands with Beach Content. From a vegetable farm over Madison Valley way. He wants work. I vouch for him."

Holter scrutinized Beach sharply and asked—

"Why aren't you out digging gold?"

"Season's getting late. I'm looking out for Winter."

"I'll be busy this Winter getting my mill into shape for the Spring rush," said Holter. "Yet I might use you. But you'd have to quit Virginia City. You'd find it rather lonesome out in Ramshorn Gulch. It's eighteen miles out, and folks said I was a fool to put in a mill there. Said it would cost ten thousand dollars to build a road over the divide so's I could get my lumber out. Yes, I believe you'd be lonely."

"I'm used to being lonesome."

"Well, that's a good sign. I'm willing to give you a trial. Tinkering around the mill, helping me get things in shape, and staying there alone when I'm in town. But first of all I need belting. I've been using untanned ox-hides. It did all right until we had a damp spell, then it began to stretch and we couldn't keep it on the pulleys.

"I've just learned that Bob Jesson, in Bannack, has eighty to a hundred feet of six-inch, two-ply belting, and I must get it. I have a notion he won't want to sell, although the belting is no good to him. I was thinking what would be the best way to get at him when you two came along. I must have that belting if it costs me six hundred dollars gold, which would clean me out of ready money.

"In Salt Lake City I could buy the same thing for thirty cents a foot, or twenty-four dollars for eighty feet. So you can understand how badly I need it. The mill is shut down now for the need of it. Suppose you take my gold and go to Bannack and try to buy it?"

"With so much depending on your getting it perhaps you'd better go. I'd hate to fail," demurred Beach.

"I can't go. I have a feeling Jesson wouldn't sell to me anyway. I've met him several times, and we didn't hit it off. He was one of those who laughed at the idea of a mill paying in Ramshorn Gulch. But aside from that I've got lots of trouble right here to keep me busy. The miners in Biven's Gulch are planning to take water from Ramshorn. The two gulches are three miles apart. I've got to head that off, or they'll leave me without any water for my mill. Do you want to go?"

The prospect of action was very alluring. Beach had hesitated for fear of disappointing Holter in a crisis. But if Holter couldn't go and some one must go—

"I'll start just as soon as I can get my horse from the hotel corral," he decided.

"That's the proper spirit. I have a notion you'll do my errand fine," said Holter. "You can send the belting up on the stage. I'll get the gold, and you can be off as soon as you are ready."

Beidler entered the conversation with the advice:

"You'd better bring the gold to my cabin Holter. And let no one know you're doing it."

Thus was Beach given to understand that the mere task of taking the six hundred dollars to Bannack City was not an easy one. His heart beat a little faster, but he felt no desire to withdraw from his bargain.

"I'll get my horse and go direct to the cabin," he said.

As he hurried off to the corral Beidler told Holter:

"He's all right. He has lots to learn, but he won't learn anything crooked. He's inclined to believe Henry Plummer is an honest man."

"Then tell him not to wait for me. I'm not bringing any gold to your cabin," promptly retorted Holter.

Beidler laughed and insisted:

"It's mighty good reason why we should trust him. He's honest. He thinks all men who appear to be honest are honest. He has plenty of courage, or he would keep his mouth shut when I say things about Plummer.

"Ought to hear him come back at me. He wants to know why I think and talk as I do. Proves he does his own thinking and makes up his own mind. Let him think well of Plummer. Time enough for him to change his mind when he meets up with some evidence besides hearsay. I respect him for not being influenced by me."

"Maybe you're right, X," mused Holter. "I bank a heap on your judgment, of course. Very well. I'll let him try; but it would be a hard jolt if he lost the gold. Building that road over the divide and doing all the grading nearly cleaned me out. I'll drop in with the gold.

"I've worried myself half-sick over that belting. Why, X, if I don't get it the Gamble mill below Nevada City will get all the orders, and I can't saw a log. Gamble is lucky. The timber grows all around his mill and he can turn out lumber for two years without doing much hauling."

"Don't get down in the mouth. The two of you can't begin to supply the demand. Now we'll separate, or some of the gang will begin to think something is up."

HALF an hour later Beach dismounted at the cabin. On entering he found Beidler alone. In reply to his questioning look Beidler gravely informed him—

"He isn't coming."

Beach's face fell. He had worked up a fine enthusiasm for the adventure.

"I'm sorry he didn't learn his mind before I took my horse from the corral," he grumbled.

Then he recovered his sense of fair play and added:

"Still, I don't blame him. He knows nothing about me. He'd be foolish to trust his working capital to a stranger."

Beidler's face became very merry as he threw two bags on the table and explained:

"He isn't coming because he already has been here. We thought it best the three of us shouldn't be here at the same time. Now there is no connection between his brief visit and your coming. There's the gold. Roll it up snug in your blankets and do your dernedest."

"I feel better," said Beach. "But I couldn't blame him if he had changed his mind. Hope I win out."

"I'll first hope you get the gold there without meeting any agents."

"You really believe there is danger?"

"If any one suspected your errand there'd be danger fast enough. While they can't know about the gold they may take a notion to steal your horse. Then it would be good-by to the six hundred. They have spies everywhere."

"I'll take the gold through, or die trying."

"Which sounds idiotic," laughed Beidler. "Six hundred dollars can be earned again, but a man is a long time dead. Follow the stage road. If any one gets curious about your business just say you're looking around for work and hope to find a good job at Bannack.

"If you're held up don't try to pull your gun. Put them up and keep them up. No dying. Coming back you'll be in no danger—if you buy the belting. And I can't imagine any man refusing six hundred dollars for twenty-four dollars' worth of leather. But if Jesson should refuse he might tell of your offer and it would be known that you had the gold with you. In that case you'll have to use your own judgment in getting back. I'd love to go with you——"

"No, sir!" broke in Beach.

"Exactly. I'd love to go, but my going wouldn't help you any with Holter. You must do it alone. I believe you will. Better start now—and the best of luck."

Securing the bags inside his blanket-roll, Beach mounted and waited while Beidler briefly gave him some road directions.

"You'll pass close to Dempsey's Cottonwood Ranch, but don't call there. Next you'll come to Rattlesnake Ranch, and perhaps it would be as safe to stop there as to make a camp outside where some one would run on to you and get curious. The outlaws make both places their headquarters. If they accept you at the Rattlesnake as a young man hunting work they'll probably let you through as your horse isn't any prize-winner for looks."

Suddenly Beidler grew boisterous and began a stream of jokes and inconsequential remarks. Beach was surprized until Beidler warned:

"Don't look around or act surprized at what I'm saying. But after you're clear of the town wipe out a small cross, made with chalk, on the back of your saddle. I'm afraid it's the gang's mark, meaning your horse is to be taken. I just noticed it."

Beach could not restrain an involuntary

start, but Beidler hissed a warning and began laughing and joking again. Beach forced a responsive grin just as two men rounded the corner of the second cabin up the gulch and slowly sauntered by.

Beidler kept up his nonsense until the two men were some distance away. Beach murmured:

"I know one of them. He's called the Wild Cat. He tried to see what was in our freight wagon out at the farm. Williamson and I drew our guns and made him and his companion turn tail."

"That explains his interest in you. They're making sure the sign is still on the saddle. Lucky you didn't rub it out before they came along. Putting on the mark shows they don't intend to follow you, but are telling the fellows ahead the horse is to be stolen and anything else you may have. Remember you have only one life. Don't throw it away. Without the mark I don't believe they'll touch your horse. Best of luck."

OUT of the gulch and galloping along the stage road, Beach searched the grassy, rounded hills and the rim of ranges beyond as if expecting an outlaw to pop up at any minute and dispute his advance. Unlike the country farther north, the timber was of scattered growth, and the erosive scars and drifts stood naked in their ugliness. As his spying failed to discover any lawless men he overcame his nervousness and endeavored to plan a system of defense, for he did not relish Beidler's advice concerning non-resistance.

Yet common sense warned him he would be given no chance to draw his forty-four, and would be riddled did he attempt it, in event he was waylaid. One safeguard he was careful to remember was the elimination of the chalk-mark on his saddle. Not satisfied with rubbing it out, he paused at a small creek and washed the saddle clean.

A mile from the creek he met six men, dusty and travel-stained. They halted him and asked his name. He told them and demanded their business in turn, speaking fearlessly.

"Posse sent after a murderer," gruffly replied the leader. "Where'd you git that hoss?"

"Brought him over the mountains from Salt Lake last Spring. Had him on a vegetable farm in the Madison Valley all Summer. What about it?"

"Don't go to be too pert," warned the leader as he dismounted. "Looks like a hoss I've seen afore, and not under your legs either."

As he spoke he walked around the animal.

"It's my horse. Sheriff Plummer will tell you that. He met me and my people when we came to Bannack last Spring. He was with us yesterday after we reached Virginia from the Madison Fork Valley."

Several of the posse exchanged words in an undertone; and one of them remarked:

"Reckon he's all right, Hank. Some of the boys see him with the sheriff last night."

Hank climbed into the saddle, his expression sullen and dissatisfied.

"What luck with the murderer?" asked Beach.

"Don't see any prisoner, do ye?" harshly asked the leader.

"But you might have hung him."

"Well, we didn't. He got clear. Ned Williamson knows the mountains too well, and he had too much of a start, for us to come up with him. We'll be gitting on, boys."

With a nod from two or three of the horsemen the posse resumed the journey to Virginia City, and Beach was left to wonder if the elimination of the chalk-mark had saved him the horse.

He was convinced that his mention of Plummer's name and the fact that some of the men had seen him in the sheriff's company had done him no harm. Only he did not know how to interpret all this. If Plummer was square then he had been in no danger from the posse, and the chalk-mark could have had no significance to the men. If the posse was composed of road-agents then Plummer must be working with them.

He allowed his horse to proceed more leisurely and passed within sight of Dempsey's ranch late in the afternoon. He was hungry and was tempted to call and secure something to eat, but decided to follow Beidler's advice and press on.

The ranch, while said to be a rendezvous for the outlaws, served as a station of the stage line, one of the Peabody & Caldwell Company's horse-corrals being located there. At the Rattlesnake Ranch, also, the stage company kept horses.

It was late in the evening when he sighted the lights of the ranch building. As he rode up to the door a man stepped outside and closed the door behind him, so as not to stand in the light streaming from the long room, and called out—

"Who are you?"

The question was punctuated by the click of a rifle brought to a full cock.

"Traveler bound for Bannack. I want lodging for the night, something to eat, and feed for my horse."

"So many —— thieves round here we have to be careful," growled the man. "You ride alone?"

Beach assured him that he did.

"Hop down. One of the boys will take care of your nag."

Beach slipped from the saddle and removed his blanket-roll and for the first time wondered if it might not be difficult for him to conceal the bags of gold when he unrolled his blankets to turn in. With the roll over his shoulder he entered the ranch house behind his host. The main room served as a way-station for the stage company, a store, saloon, and bedroom.

"Dump your roll where you want to sleep," grumbled the man, who was squat of form and wearing a bewildering growth of hair and whiskers.

And he pointed to half a dozen mattresses filled with hay.

Before an open fire at one end of the room were four men, smoking and drinking from bottles. They paid no attention to Beach. He carelessly deposited his blankets on a mattress and walked forward to the group. Each of the four gave him a sharp glance and nodded curtly to his general salutation.

After a few moments' silence one of them remarked in a pleasing voice—

"You travel late."

"I was late in starting from Virginia City. Work isn't so plentiful there now the miners are getting ready to quit the diggings."

"It's the wrong end of the season. There will be plenty of work in the Spring."

Beach replied that in the Spring and throughout the Summer he should be at work on his father's vegetable farm. The spokesman for the four, tall and well-built, with blue eyes and light hair, hitched aside to allow Beach to come up closer to the fire and asked for Virginia City news.

Beach told of the murder of Gold Dick and of meeting the posse that had chased the suspect. Dick's death did not seem to arouse much interest. But when Beach told of the new strike in Biven's Gulch there was a distinct stir.

All four took turns in asking questions, and Beach was kept busy answering them. The well-mannered fellow turned his blue eyes fully on Beach and remarked—

"I'd have thought you would have taken a chance and gone to the gulch."

"More than two hundred went. An old-timer said most of them would be back in town by tomorrow night. I had no outfit. I must work for day wages. Tried to get work with a sawmill man, but his mill is shut down. So I'm going to Bannack."

The company's interest, so far as Beach and his desire for work was concerned, vanished. The blue-eyed man, called "George" by his companions, asked one or two perfunctory questions and then became engaged in a muffled conversation with the other three men. From bits of their talk Beach learned that they were discussing the ten-ounce diggings discovered by Tin Cup.

The ranchkeeper entered and announced that supper was ready for Beach.

Beach went to the long table and found meat, bread and coffee. Then came the first thrill of the evening. As he seated himself one of the four at the fire lifted his head. He was an old man, and his face was simple almost to imbecility. With a cackling laugh he called out—

"What they saying at Virginny about the stage hold-up?"

A muttered imprecation, and an elbow driven into the old man's ribs that set him to coughing, told Beach that the four were traveling in company and feared their elderly companion would say things he should not.

Pretending not to observe the quietus put upon his questioner, Beach paused in eating long enough to reply:

"We hadn't heard anything about a hold-up. Was it the morning coach?"

The old man slumped back by the fire and refused to speak. The man called George spoke up, however, and said:

"It's only a rumor that there was a hold-up between here and Bannack. One of the herders here got hold of it from some one passing."

Beach resumed eating, but his appetite had failed him. He was positive the coach containing his father and sister had been halted by the outlaws, and he felt deathly afraid for what must have happened when the bandits failed to find his father's money. He could feel the gaze of the three men studying him as he forced himself to eat; and controlling his voice, he casually remarked:

"Sheriff Plummer hadn't heard anything. I was talking with him this morning just before starting for Bannack. He probably has received word by this time if there's anything in the rumor."

The man with the blue eyes slowly approached the table and politely asked—

"You know Plummer?"

"He's one of the first men my father, sister and I got acquainted with last Spring when we reached Bannack. He took supper with us last night and had breakfast with us this morning."

"Henry Plummer is a good sheriff. Some folks expect him to capture all the thieves in the country empty-handed. It's lucky that there are other folks who know it's a big job to catch even one man in this country.

"My name is Ives. George Ives."

BEACH endeavored to appear as if he were hearing the name for the first time and gave his own. Ives was brisk in manner, prepossessing to the eye, and not more than twenty-five years old. Beach was twenty-two but felt many years younger than the man who had shot George Carthart to death, and was reputed to have killed other and more worth-while men.

But there was nothing in Ives' appearance to suggest the man-killer. His visage was good-natured, and his manner impelled the belief he preferred smiling to frowning. Had Beach not heard so much to the fellow's discredit he would readily have accepted him as being most genial and companionable and well liked by a large circle of acquaintances.

Ives seated himself at the table and chatted pleasantly, asking many questions about Virginia City, few of which Beach could answer. In turn Beach learned that the men at the fire were all hard-working prospectors commonly known as "Whisky Bill," "Long John," and George Hilderman. It was the last who had revealed the holding-up of the stage.

The other two were excellent types of what Beach believed a frontier ruffian to be. He indulged in this judgment only tentatively so far as their outward appearances went, as experience already had taught him that once man surrenders to a natural growth of hair and whiskers and wears dilapidated clothing he becomes a wild man in externals. Despite such a surface deterioration a man might be the product of some famous university and possess a heart that never entertained evil.

There was no question as to Ives' intellectual background, however, and if half as bad as pictured he was a most conscienceless villain. And if the others were his mates then they must be villains.

As he talked with Ives he noted how frequently the conversation was skilfully swung around so as to include Plummer. Beach spoke freely, realizing that Ives was checking up his claim of acquaintance with the sheriff. Finally Ives rose and walked back to the fire and spoke sharply to Hilderman. The old man shuffled to one side. Ives then called out to Beach:

"Come up here by the fire when you're through. Plenty of room."

Beach finished his supper and took Hilderman's place. Whisky Bill and Long John studied him furtively, but were pleasant enough in addressing him. Hilderman jerked up his head as if aroused from a stupor and began—

"Queer they ain't heard nothing about——"

Whisky Bill interrupted him with an oath and told him to keep his mouth shut and not to do all the talking when others were trying to speak. Beach mentally convicted three of the quartet as being as evil as they looked.

Ives still bothered him. Ives might be a killer and yet not a robber. There was something so winning in his manner, and his intellectual attainments were so easily perceived, that it would require more to condemn him than in the case of any of the others.

The talk lapsed. Ives stared dreamily into the fire even as Hilderman was staring, each finding his own pictures. The outer door of the ranch room flew open. The ranchkeeper was excitedly crying:

"Say, young feller! Thieves have busted into the corral and took your hoss!"

Hilderman's aged face was twisted into a broad grin as he turned to look at the ranchkeeper. Ives leaped to his feet, advanced rapidly down the room and angrily cried:

"Get your men out to find that horse! Thieves break in before any one has gone to bed? You're crazy! The horse has strayed. See he's back at once, or you'll answer to me."

The ranchkeeper seemed to be bewildered and did not start the search with sufficient promptness to suit Ives. Catching him by the arm and speaking low and incisively, Ives propelled him to the door and through it, and called after him—

"Don't show your ugly head again until Mr. Content's horse is back in the corral."

Returning to the fire, he said to Beach:

"Those fellows disgust me. Some lazy hound leaves the corral open, and the animals stray. Then they try to shift the blame by yelling, 'Horse-thieves!' "

"But maybe my horse has been stolen," said Beach, greatly disturbed by the thought.

"Your horse will be waiting for you in the morning," Ives assured him. "I know that drunken scum of a Spanish Pedro. It isn't the first time he's allowed the stock to stray. Let all the stage horses out today and held up the stage an hour or so before they could be found and brought back. Don't you worry. I'll guarantee the horse will be found shortly."

Whisky Bill, Long John and old Hilderman now tired of the fire and sought their blankets. Beach sat up to worry about his horse. Ives kept him company, but talked little. As Beach observed the clear-cut profile he believed the man was passing through a somber mood. At last he turned to Beach and between yawns said:

"I'm going to turn in. But first I'll ask about your horse."

Before he could take this trouble the ranchkeeper entered and said:

"We found the horse. Pedro must have left the corral open. He's getting mighty careless."

"Pedro will lose those big ears of his some day," Ives ominously remarked. "Tell him I said so. Well, Mr. Content, I'll say good-night. Hope you sleep well. The mattresses are cursed hard."

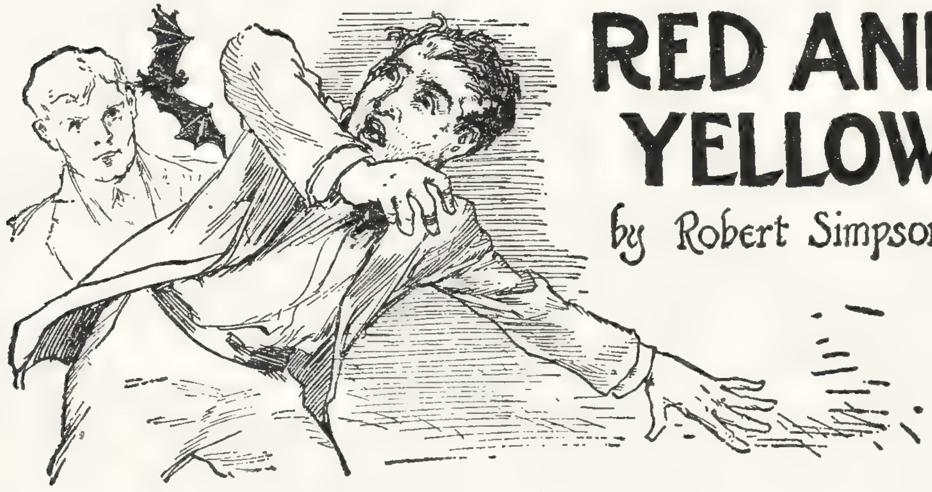
"Thanks. Same to you, Mr. Ives."

And despite the hardness of the hay-stuffed bag Beach was soon asleep, his boots and the two bags of gold under a fold of the blanket serving as his pillow.

TO BE CONTINUED

RED AND YELLOW

by Robert Simpson



Author of "The Gray Charteris," "The Tenth Man," etc.

HARTH said Tonner would probably kill a man before the Niger swamps were done with him. And Harth rarely said anything in vain.

This was while Harth was in charge of Marsden & Co.'s shop at Benin City, and Tonner was assistant district commissioner there. Later, Harth was transferred to Warri and lost sight of the A. D. C. for several months.

In Warri, however, Harth encountered Kingdon.

"Red and Yellow," copyright, 1922, by Robert Simpson.

Aside from the circumstance that Kingdon was Marsden & Co.'s agent at Warri, he was also known throughout the Oil Rivers country as a justly famous man. Further, with the exception of Flinders, the parrot collector, he was the only American in the Delta.

This combination of attributes interested Harth immensely, and, knowing the story of Kingdon's comparatively recent march to fame—a story that has been told elsewhere—he regarded his new agent with a confident expectation of things to come.

In juxtaposition, Kingdon and Harth bore a vague resemblance to an automatic and a twelve-inch gun. Not that there was anything visibly militant about either of them; simply that their physical peculiarities measured up that way.

Kingdon was small and dark and unobtrusive; Harth was large and red—almost vermilion—and impossible to conceal. Kingdon's vocal demonstrations were generally confined to indifferently offered statements of fact that were simple and concise and discovered, upon analysis, to be in the vicinity of the last word upon the subject. Harth was not effervescent in speech, it was true, but there was no end to the number and character of the noises his absurd button-mouth could and did make.

Harth liked Kingdon. In the narrow confines of mangrove-bound West African trading-factory life, where men were compelled to tolerate each other in spite of the sizzling heat and the weary monotony of the menu, Harth appreciated the quieting influence of the man from Massachusetts. And if, because of his excessive advantage in poundage, Harth was inclined to assume a protective attitude toward Kingdon, the latter was not aware of it. Not even after Tonner came to take charge of the treasury office at the old red-brown Warri consulate.

Tonner had been a cavalryman at some time or other. Both the Scots Greys and the Northwest Mounted Police were mentioned in this connection. He walked as a guardsman is supposed to walk, and though his hair was slightly tinged with gray above the ears, his clean-shaven face indicated the early thirties.

From the standpoint of the trading-community, his principal business in life was the collection of customs' duties. These were payable in cash—silver for the greater part—and it was alleged in common gossip that Tonner hated the sight of a two-shilling piece.

He lived in the consulate annex farther up the beach, and during most of the noonday interval of rest, he slept. When he awoke from his somnolent Turkish bath, his mood was not amiable. Therefore, after he had been in Warri a month or so, it became understood that it was not advisable to pay customs' duties to Tonner in the afternoon.

It was further believed that he was the one white man in Warri who had no interest in the comings and goings of the mail launch. He was never known to write letters or to receive any. Those who were in a position to study and know him best, declared briefly, that he was all right if one left him alone. Otherwise, there was no saying what might happen.

He was a good batsman at cricket, played tennis in a slashing kind of way that was likely to intimidate any less strenuous player, had a somber sort of failing for poker at which he lost and won without becoming visibly disturbed about it, and was freely admitted to be an expert wielder of a hippo-hide thong.

Altogether, he was a man of variable and violent possibilities.

LATE one afternoon, Tonner came along to Marsden & Co.'s beach in pursuit of a pair of walking-boots. Before going into the shop to see Harth, he went up to the living quarters overhead to become acquainted with Kingdon. He had heard a great deal about Marsden's Warri agent, but had never met him.

"Thought I'd come up for a minute and say chin-chin," he announced when he had introduced himself; and seemed to be trying to realize that the stories he had heard about Kingdon were true. "Busy?"

"Not a bit. Come around the corner and sit down. What would you like to drink?"

"Oh—er—thanks. Just a cocktail."

They went around to that part of the veranda overlooking the river and made themselves comfortable in Madeira chairs. Tonner had his cocktail, and Kingdon drank lime-juice. The several bullets and pot-legs Kingdon had absorbed into his anatomy on a recent, memorable occasion, had not improved his complexion. His natural pallor had deepened, making his face appear even smaller than before. But there was no cloud in the quiet of his eyes.

Tonner admitted that he had come in search of a pair of walking-boots, asked Kingdon's advice about them, talked in a jerky, staccato fashion of this and that for several minutes, then said, as if he had just thought of it:

"Oh, by the way. One of your fellows came along this afternoon to pay some duties. Sent a boy over to my diggings to wake me up, too. Chap called Balloch, I think. I thought it was pretty —— impertinent, don't you?"

"What time was that?" Kingdon asked quietly and pleasantly.

Tonner's eyes quickened suddenly.

"What the —— has that got to do with it? If I choose to sleep all afternoon, that's my affair. No confounded palm-oil ruffian is going to dictate to me what my office hours will be!"

"No, of course, not," Kingdon agreed simply and rose. "Mr. Harth will show you those boots. Good afternoon."

Tonner wrenched himself out of his chair and his tall, straight figure assumed an added inch or two of height. For a few seconds, Harth's prediction that Tonner would probably kill a man before the Delta swamps were done with him, was readily understandable.

"——!"

"Just as you please."

Tonner's eyes widened—then wavered. Perhaps he took thought of the experience Lionel Danby Fosdyck, the provincial commissioner, had had with Kingdon. In any case, he had the appearance of one who is face to face with a phenomenon. Then, because there was nothing coherent he could think of to say, he laughed with a hollow kind of heartiness, spun sharply about and departed, still laughing.

Kingdon sat down again. Without haste or any visible sign of nervousness, he called for a house-boy.

"Ask Mr. Balloch to come here, please."

"Yessah."

Presently, Balloch appeared. He was young, but of powerful build; a fair and rangy type of the ancient Nordic race, lean but compact, with tremendous driving force between the shoulders.

His respect and regard for Kingdon, however, were almost a religion; even more intense than his contempt for the name of government. He had been privileged to witness the thing Kingdon had done on the bullet and pot-leg occasion, and he was not in the least likely to forget it.

But a fine of ten pounds which he had been compelled to pay into the government treasury for taking it upon himself to discipline a certain colored sergeant of the police with a straight, hard right to the jaw, made it impossible for Balloch to entertain the thought of government or government officials with any pleasure. Simply as a matter of principle, he disapproved heartily of anything that wore a uniform.

"Tonner says you woke him up when you went along to pay those duties," Kingdon announced conversationally. "It was after three, wasn't it, when you left here?"

"Nearly half-past when I reached his office," Balloch growled. "But I didn't wake him up. It was Captain Marlin of the transport department who sent the colored clerk in the treasury office over to Tonner's room."

"Why did Marlin interfere?"

"Saw me standing around the treasury office waiting for some one to take the money, and wanted to save Tonner a yelp from Fosdyck."

"Where was Fosdyck? I thought he had gone up to Onitsha?"

"Came back this afternoon. He was up at the barracks when I was at the consulate. Was Tonner ratty?"

Kingdon glanced over the veranda rail toward the river.

"All right, Balloch. I simply wanted to be quite sure."

After dinner Balloch told Harth about it.

"What do you think of a man who'll come whining to your boss about you like that? Isn't he the five-grain tabloid?"

Harth stopped imitating a thrush at eve and became almost serious.

"Tonner is bad medicine. Ugly. Too much red in his spectrum. Keep as far away from him as you can."

Balloch indulged in an appropriate expletive and added:

"I'm not going to walk on tiptoe because he says so. What do you think I am?"

"I haven't decided yet," Harth informed him pleasantly. "But I'll be better able to tell you when Tonner is through with you."

THE *Boma* scraped alongside Marsden's wharf several days later, deposited five thousand cases of trade-gin thereon, and departed. In due course, when all breakages had been allowed for, there was a customs' bill to be paid.

Marsden & Co.'s safe was at the back of the shop and Harth saw Kingdon go there with a house-boy one afternoon, and presently saw him return. The house-boy was laden with two small money sacks, and Kingdon, as he passed Harth's desk through the press of half-naked native traders who surrounded it, said casually—

"I'm going along to the consulate."

Harth nodded and glanced at his watch. It was 2:55.

"Couldn't I take the money along," he suggested, "and save you the trip?"

"I need the exercise," Kingdon said with a slight smile, and passed out of the shop.

The day was heavy with a sickly, gnawing heat, but the distance to the consulate was short and did not provide much exercise. Kingdon reached the treasury office at three o'clock.

The usual cluster of native hangers-on and the customary number of native police stood about outside the doors in various attitudes of afternoon indifference.

Tonner, an hour behind time, had just reached his office, and his solitary colored clerk had made it immediately necessary to have business elsewhere the moment his superior arrived.

When Kingdon strolled in followed by his house-boy, Tonner was alone. And Tonner's humor was, if anything, even more unpleasant than usual. He had not slept well—one never does at midday in the tropics—and his boy had forgotten to empty the dirty water out of the wash-basin; the mosquito-bar on his bed had developed a rip because he had tucked it in too tightly and then, in restless slumber, had rolled against it; further, Fosdyck had informed him that morning that his leave could not begin till at least a month later than he had anticipated.

"What the —— do you want?" he snapped at Kingdon the moment the latter entered the office.

"I don't want anything," Kingdon said in that simple, imperturbable way he had. "I'm in a giving humor."

And he nodded to the house-boy to put the money sacks down on Tonner's desk.

"You should pay duties in the morning," Tonner growled surlily as the boy obeyed Kingdon's nod. "I'm much too busy in the afternoon."

Kingdon knew that Tonner was not busy; that he was simply sulky and disliked doing anything at all after the midday interim.

"I'm sorry. But I'm afraid we are too busy in the morning. That's when we do the bulk of our business, you know."

"What the —— have I got to do with that?"

"Nothing. I'm simply explaining it to you."

"And I'm telling you these duties should be paid in the forenoon! In future, I won't accept them at any other time."

Kingdon nodded agreeably.

"Still, I think we'll continue to pay them when convenient during office hours."

Tonner's face grew suddenly black with passion, and as he got slowly to his feet, Kingdon's house-boy backed, with a swift, scuffling, sidewise motion, toward the door. Kingdon scarcely moved. His expression became quizzical and his right hand, which chanced to hold a handkerchief, traveled leisurely up to his forehead.

"If you're going to be boisterous," he suggested, before Tonner's tongue could function, "let's go outside. That'll give me room to run, and it's much too hot in here anyway."

Tonner paused as sharply as if he had run his head into a stone wall. There came into his eyes a sudden, gaping kind of uncertainty and his tensed hands lost most of their tension and slipped slowly back to his sides. Obviously he was at a decided loss, and even the most trivial of words, profane or otherwise, entirely eluded him for the moment.

"I'll try to accommodate you on those morning payments whenever I can," Kingdon added quietly. "But I can't be too rash with my promises."

Tonner's whole body relaxed. He did not look at Kingdon now. Grunting something that was indistinguishable, he slumped into his chair again and with his glance bent to his desk, pulled one of the money sacks toward him. The house-boy in the doorway stopped showing the whites of his eyes and edged a little nearer to his small master again.

It was plain, however, that Tonner disliked the task before him. He went at it almost viciously, strewing the silver coins all over the desk. There were half-crowns and shillings among them, but the bulk of the money was made up of two-shilling pieces which, in West African trade, was the accepted standard of value.

Cloth and soap and gin, palm-oil and kernels and mangrove breakwater sticks, and all other mediums of barter were worth "one piece" or "one hundred pieces" as the case might be; meaning one or one hundred two-shilling pieces. This method of reckoning had been fixed originally by the nominal cost to the native of a piece of six or eight yard print cloth, of the quality most popularly endorsed by the masses.

Tonner may or may not have known this. And whether it was that his antipathy was directed against silver generally or specifically against the two-shilling piece, or simply and broadly against every and any kind of work in the heat of the afternoon, could not be determined.

Kingdon, idly leaning against the desk, watched him closely.

Tonner said nothing when he had finished. He returned the money to the sacks, gave Kingdon his receipt, and, turning his back upon him to place the money in the safe, entirely ignored Kingdon's quietly polite, "Good afternoon."

Kingdon's expression betrayed no discomfiture. He strolled round to the post-office, bought some stamps, chatted pleasantly with the Sierra Leonese postmaster for a minute; met Dr. Farley, the provincial medical officer, and talked with him on nothing in particular for another few minutes, then trailed mechanically by his house-boy, went back to the treasury office.

Tonner was still alone. The safe was closed. He was sitting at his desk fiddling idly with an official report of some sort. But when he saw Kingdon again, he straightened with a jerk.

"Some one—I forgot who it was said you played poker," Kingdon began before Tonner had a chance to speak. "Would you care to come along to my place some evening for dinner and have a game? I haven't played poker in real earnest since I left the States."

Tonner managed to reach his feet. He literally shivered. It was as if something appalling had happened to him. Then out of the upheaval there came a low, thick voice that said jerkily—

"Two of us—not much of a game—no use——"

"Bring Marlin or any one else you care to, and I'll find a fourth. Is Saturday evening all right for you?"

The quiet, unhurried voice seemed to soothe, even while its calm assurance staggered. For a moment or two, Tonner was on the verge of rejecting Kingdon's simply offered olive-leaf, then a faint wave of color mounted to his forehead.

"Marlin'll do. Plays a fairly good game. Saturday's all right."

"Fine. Dinner's at seven. Chin-chin."

"Chin," Tonner grunted, and when Kingdon had gone, the A. D. C. sat down again as if he needed a chair quite badly. It was some time before he understood what had really happened.

When Marsden & Co.'s shop closed that evening and Harth climbed the stairs leading to the living-quarters and a welcome bath, he found Kingdon at the top leaning upon the veranda rail waiting for him.

"Do you play poker," Kingdon asked without any explanation.

"I do."

"All right. We're going to have company for dinner Saturday evening—Tonner and Marlin—and a little game afterwards."

"Tonner!" Harth was not given to exclamation points. But he indulged freely on this occasion.

"Yes. I've heard he plays very well."

And that was all Kingdon had to say about it.

Harth passed on to his room and his bath; and after a while the kernel clerk, who was a bespectacled young man named Riffin, and who occupied the room next to that in which the wooden bath-tubs were, heard Harth splashing about ponderously, not singing, but in the throes of an unusual silence. Unable to stand it any longer, Riffin called out:

"What's the matter, little blue boy? Are you sick?"

There was no answer. Nothing but the continued splashing of waters and the deep, deep silence of a soul amazed.

THE arrival of Saturday evening did not assist Harth to a more placid state of mind. He knew Tonner; had witnessed one or two of the things he was capable of doing in the heat of passion, and he saw no virtue in making unnecessary allowances for the violence of a man who was at least fifty per cent. irresponsible. True, these things had always been done to natives, but—

Harth was not afraid. He was troubled. He liked peace, and his popping blue eyes pleaded with the world for rest. With an expression that would have been worth money to an undertaker, he claimed he had come out to the Niger country to reduce, and he wanted to be left alone to do it.

And it was not pleasant, particularly in the tropics, to have to fight to keep the peace. It was much less pleasant to have to kill. Harth, who disliked morbid prognostications of any kind, did his best at all times to keep his blood at normal temperature.

He preferred to whistle like a linnet—which he did excellently—than to squawk like a parrot or scream like an angry leopard, which he also had a taste for doing at most inopportune moments.

He entered the dining-room on Saturday evening prepared for anything. But aside from the circumstance that Balloch obviously resented the presence of Kingdon's guests, nothing untoward occurred to mar the colored stewards' respect for the white man's table manners; and the port and the liqueurs, which, of course, were not an everyday occurrence, assisted Balloch to admit that even a government man might, upon occasion, have an excuse for existence.

Tonner's attitude was one of monosyllabic politeness. He was not boorish; simply did not encourage conversation to flow his way, or deflected it when it did, so that Marlin was thus compelled to shoulder the bulk of the guests' share of the talk.

Marlin did not mind. He was a captain in the R. N. R., a man of medium height, with the face of an eagle and the disposition of a hen with a newly hatched brood of chicks. He talked, as he worked or played, in half-circles; never went straight toward an objective, but always swung wide of the mark at first, then curved in on it sidewise. Everybody liked him, however, and his fussy activities in the matter of keeping his associates out of trouble had earned him the sobriquet of "Mother" Marlin.

When dinner was over and the poker-party was on the verge of rising to adjourn to Kingdon's office living-room, a bat flew in through the wide-open dining-room door and began to wheel blindly round and round over the heads of the diners and Kroo-boy stewards.

As there was nothing unusual about the occurrence, no one paid much attention to it except the chief steward, who issued a guttural order to one of his assistants to fetch a long stick.

It was at this juncture that Kingdon rose and proceeded to lead the way out toward the veranda and his office, nodding to Harth to follow. Balloch and Riffin turned in the direction of their own rooms, but paused in the entrance to the passageway leading thereto, to see what was going to happen to the bat.

Tonner, following Kingdon and Marlin through the main dining-room doorway on to the veranda, also admitted a mild interest in the matter by turning his head. And it was at that moment that the bat, wheeling low, suddenly found the dining-room doorway again.

Harth, who was behind Tonner, a little to his right, felt the tip of a wing clip his ear as the bat whirred wildly past. The next instant, evidently frightened and confused, it crashed full tilt into Tonner's face.

A throaty bellow of amaze and pain was indiscribably mingled with a shrill squeak, as Tonner flung his hand instinctively upward. And a fraction of time later, the ugly, furry thing that was crushed in Tonner's huge right hand, was whirled away from him, with a thick "Ugh!" of disgust, over the veranda rail.

For a second or two, Tonner stood stock still, gray-white even to the lips, glanced stupidly at his right thumb and saw the red upon it.

"——!" he muttered absently, grinned like a death's-head at Harth, and then slid quietly to the floor at his feet.

Harth scarcely moved. His expression of amaze would have been funny if it had not been so serious. He looked down upon Tonner's sprawled figure in a kind of gasping unbelief, and as Balloch, followed by Rippin, came quickly across the dining-room floor, Harth looked at the big beach clerk with something of an apology in his popping blue eyes.

"Mother" Marlin also gasped. He and Kingdon, walking ahead, and arrested by the cry Tonner had uttered, had seen him throw the bat away from him over the veranda rail. Then they had seen him fall.

Marlin ran the few steps to Tonner's

side. Kingdon strolled. And while Marlin stooped and tried to turn Tonner over upon his back to get a look at his face, and excitedly ordered one of the house-boys to go for Dr. Farley, Kingdon caught Harth's eye and said simply—

"Have Balloch help you carry him into my room."

Aside from Marlin's whisperings of anxiety, which were addressed to no one in particular, there was little or no further conversation. It was obvious that Tonner had simply fainted; and this, particularly from Harth's point of view, stifled all comment.

Harth's whole previous conception of Tonner reeled and came down with a crash. And it would probably be some little time before he would get all of the dust out of his eyes and readjust a new mental attitude to fit the case. Kingdon alone did not seem to be at all surprized by the turn of events. When Harth and Balloch had carried Tonner into the little agent's office and laid him on the couch, Kingdon went about the business of reviving the A. D. C. as if fainting six-footers were an every-day occurrence.

Presently, Tonner opened his eyes again and the first thing he did was to throw his hand up to his face and feel it all over in a dazed kind of inquiry. He had to use his left hand for this because Kingdon held on to his right and completed the business of applying iodine and a small strip of bandage cloth to the thumb—where the bat had bitten Tonner.

The A. D. C.'s eyes held a glassy look, and every so often he muttered, "Horrible!" and shrunk a little deeper into the sofa cushions as if he were cold. There was a heavy sweat upon his forehead, which Marlin, with the best of intentions, tried to absorb with his handkerchief. Tonner jerked his head away angrily.

"Leave my face alone!"

But he did not seem to mind Kingdon bandaging his thumb; nor did he refuse the three fingers of brandy Kingdon's house-boy brought him. He swallowed it at a gulp, then simply lay still for a little while, till Farley, the provincial medical officer, arrived.

No one bothered Tonner with questions, and when Farley came in, got a glimpse of Tonner's eyes and made a show of taking his pulse, he did not ask him any questions either. After a minute or two he inquired of Kingdon why the A. D. C.'s hand was bandaged, nodded briefly when Kingdon explained, and after another minute's pause, said briskly.

"All right, Tonner. I think you can manage to struggle along to the consulate on your own feet."

"Certainly," Tonner agreed, and at once tried to sit up. "What—what the ——" he gasped, clutching at his left side as his head fell back on the couch again.

A poignant fear leaped into his eyes.

"What's up?"

Harth moved quickly around the head of the couch to assist Tonner to rise if need be, and Marlin also offered to help. Balloch, who occupied the background in silent contempt, remained there and became just a little more contemptuous; while Kingdon, standing quietly at the foot of the couch, watched the A. D. C.'s face with an intentness that was kind, but not in the least anxious.

Farley reached mechanically for Tonner's left wrist again, but he did not take his pulse this time. He pulled the big man into a sitting position with a jerk.

"Cramp, I imagine," he explained casually as Tonner stared at him. "Get up and move around."

"Surely. I'm all right. Thanks."

Tonner struggled to his feet and swayed upon them.

"Sorry to break up our game like this, Kingdon. But I'm all right now. Quite all right. Thanks, Farley."

He lurched toward the door leading out to the veranda, and Marlin would have followed had Farley not halted him sharply with a look. In the doorway Tonner paused and again his hand went up to his face. Then, with an obvious effort, his shoulders reached something approximating their usual height and his knees stiffened. He turned his head.

"Good night, gentlemen," he said distinctly and went out.

Farley caught Marlin's eye and they followed, the doctor exchanging a significant look with Kingdon as he passed from the room. Kingdon, moving toward his desk, offered Harth and Balloch a cigaret.

Harth found a match in silence and supplied Balloch with a light.

"Scared blue, wasn't he?" Balloch suggested laconically after a puff or two, while Kingdon absently shuffled a pack of cards.

Kingdon did not answer directly. He

appeared to be thinking of something entirely apart from Tonner's startling exhibition of "funkitis" and as he trifled with the cards, he glanced out into the winking blackness down river.

Something that was akin to a pathetic kind of envy had come into his small, lean face, and for the moment he seemed to Harth to become even more fragile than usual.

"But," the little man commented at last slowly and almost wistfully, "hasn't he a magnificent body?"

Harth choked on some cigaret smoke and coughed more than was necessary. And later, when he and Balloch were talking the thing over in the privacy of Harth's room, Balloch looked himself and Harth over speculatively and expounded wisdom.

"Well, maybe you and I could spare the little man an inch or two apiece—me up and you around. But that wouldn't make him any bigger, would it?"

KINGDON did not see Tonner again until the end of the month, when the A. D. C. came along to Marsden's beach to pay his monthly bill. And Tonner made his appearance without any apologies or explanations.

After the business end of the visit had been attended to, they sat on Kingdon's veranda quite as if the fainting episode had never been, and while Tonner drank a whisky and soda and Kingdon sipped lime-juice, they talked indifferently of nothing in particular until a launch, that had been lying alongside the government wharf, slipped out into mid-stream and headed, with a shrill scream of its siren, for Forcados.

This was the mail launch, and, among other things, she was carrying one or two of Warri's quota of white men down to the steamer at Forcados, homeward bound.

Tonner stopped in the middle of a sentence, that did not matter, to watch her, and Kingdon, turning his head to see what had caused the interruption, thereafter watched Tonner.

The big man's face suddenly lost its customary expression of ever threatening unpleasantness, and a hurt look took its place—a look entirely foreign to Tonner, as if he had been badly disappointed in something and the departure of the launch had reminded him of it. He laughed and assumed an attitude of unusual and almost boisterous bravado.

"Confounded nuisance! Just about the time I should be getting decently tipsy in London, you'll probably be burying me out here."

Kingdon's eyes narrowed a little. He had always suspected that there was considerably more in Tonner's makeup than met the naked eye.

"How's that?" he asked, and smiled because he knew Tonner expected him to.

"I should be going down-river on that thing," Tonner said, and jerked his head in the direction of the fast disappearing mail launch. "Instead, I've got to wait another month. And it'll just be my confounded luck to have that extra month finish me."

"Why should it?" Kingdon asked quietly; and knew that Tonner was more serious than he pretended to be. "You're in good shape and, as far as I know, you've been out only a year."

"Only!" Tonner laughed disagreeably. "Isn't that enough?"

"Quite. But it isn't necessarily deadly."

Tonner picked up his whisky-and-soda glass, considered it abstractedly and put it down again.

"How long do you chaps stick it?" he asked shortly.

"Two years at a stretch for the first three trips. After that, if we can, we usually slacken off a bit."

"Slacken off!" Tonner laughed again and still more unpleasantly. "I'll wager most of you slacken off for good before you get that far!"

"Yes," quietly. "A lot of us go under on our second or third trip."

"I thought so!"

"But almighty few of us ever even think of it in the first year or so."

Tonner winced, and his head drew back a little. But he did not lose his temper. He looked, if anything, somewhat sheepish, glanced out toward the river and pretended to take an interest in the bobbing canoes that passed in the lazy quiet of the late afternoon sunshine.

"How long have you been out here, Kingdon?" he asked after a while, and his tone, though brusk, was curiously inquisitive—as if he were trying to make some kind of comparison.

"I'm finishing my fourth trip now—a bit over seven years all told."

"Including leave?"

"No."

"Good Lord!"

"And I'm only beginning," Kingdon added quietly.

Tonner looked blank, dull, and he shifted uneasily in his chair. Then he searched impatiently for his cigaret-case, found it, and Kingdon tossed him a box of matches, that happened to lie within reach of his hand.

Tonner fumbled the catch and muttered something under his breath as he stooped to pick the match-box off the floor. When he straightened, he got out of his chair with a jerk, lighted the cigaret and said abruptly.

"I'd better run along. Hope I see you again some time. Chin-chin."

There was no handshake. He did not even finish his whisky-and-soda.

Kingdon did not smile; neither did he sneer. For several minutes after Tonner had gone, he sat idly sipping his lime-juice and stared at the ceiling. Then he put the glass down, went into his office and wrote a short note to Dr. Farley, the P. M. O.

Farley's reply arrived half an hour later. It was brief and somewhat cryptic.

> All right. Thanks. I've suspected it for some time. I'll give him something that will make him sleep. FARLEY.

CALBY of the A. P. A.—African Produce Association—looked good for thirty more years of life. But Farley knew better than that. For at least a year he had been solemnly warning Calby about his stomach and the meat and drink he put into it. And Calby, who was a genial, sociable fool, had grinned and drank and—died.

It was just two days after Kingdon's talk with Tonner that Calby went down with blackwater fever. Kingdon heard of it shortly after three in the afternoon. Calby was dead and buried before midnight.

This was the first death in the Warri district for several months, but as frequently happened, after some one had broken the ice, two or three others were likely to fall in.

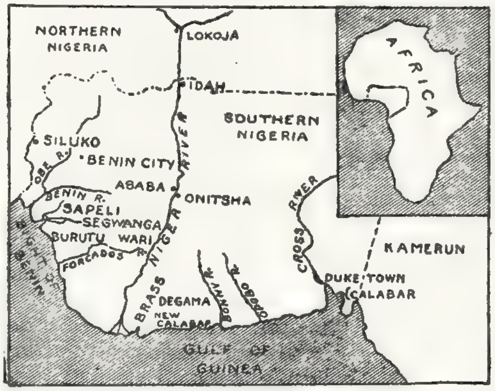
Scarcely a week later, the beach clerk on Perkins & Gray's beach, at the far end of the settlement, also contracted blackwater and went out overnight.

Then Captain Marlin, who roomed next to Tonner and messed at the same table in the consulate annex, appeared at breakfast one morning with yellowed eyes. His skin was yellow, too, but Tonner who encountered him just outside the annex dining-room door, saw the eyes first. He gulped down an exclamation with a tremendous effort and instinctively drew away.

"Just—just a minute, old chap. I—er—I've forgotten something."

He went back to his room, found his house-boy and sent him post-haste for Farley. Then he waited, his usually rather florid color paling off to a kind of dirty ash-gray. His handkerchief mopped great beads of perspiration from his forehead and he moved up and down his room clenching his teeth to keep them from chattering.

Presently, he heard Crawford of the P. W. D.—Public Works Department—who was a big, broad man with a voice to match, coming along the hall talking in no uncertain terms to Marlin.



"You can't eat, you ruddy fool! Nobody eats with jaundice. Think I want to use up any more of my sleeping-time burying nuts like you? Keep alive's my motto. Then you don't bother anybody."

Marlin relegated Crawford to an unspeakable grade of perdition and ordered his house-boy to bring his breakfast up to his room. He was a sicker man than he wanted to admit, but he did not fool Crawford, who persisted in standing guard over the invalid's bedroom door.

"Hang you, Crawford. I'm chilly. I've got to have something warm," Marlin protested peevishly.

"You'll be a —— sight chillier if you don't go to bed. Where's your thermometer? Boy!"

The stentorian bellow could have been heard at the wharf-end. It was then that

Tonner came out of his room and asked in his usual brusk way—

"What the ——'s up?"

"Mother Marlin's sick and won't admit it," Crawford replied, and took a second closer look at Tonner's queerly shifting eyes. "Help me put the fat-head to bed, will you?"

"Surely."

Tonner's voice was willing enough, but his feet seemed to drag.

As it happened, in another minute or two, Marlin needed no inducement to believe that bed was the place for him. First he shivered until Tonner could almost hear his bones rattle; then he burned till his eyeballs became dull and distant. In conjunction with jaundice, he was having one of his periodical attacks of malaria, and the combination is not a good one.

Because the jaundice weakened his normal powers of resistance, his temperature ere that day was done had climbed to a fraction over 105 degrees and stayed there. By the following evening men were speaking Mother Marlin's name softly in whispers.

KINGDON was indenting for new cargo when he heard the scuffing, dragging step on his veranda that night. And when he looked up inquiringly to see who his late visitor was, Tonner—or something that resembled him in height and breadth and cast of features—came and stood in the open doorway, a cigaret drooping from one corner of his mouth.

Tonner was not smoking. He was chewing on the cigaret as some men chew on cigars. Obviously, too, he was not aware of the fact or of the subsequent messy effect. He stood looking at Kingdon soundlessly, as if he had come there in something of a trance and was not at all sure why he had done so, or how he was going to explain it.

Kingdon put down his pen, pushed back his chair and rose.

"Come in, Tonner. I'm not busy."

"Thanks." Tonner remained in the doorway, balancing himself on his heels; and the night at his back seemed to become darker and quieter at the sound of his voice. "Marlin—you know Mother Marlin, of course—transport man? He's going out, poor devil."

This was said like a lesson. Tonner looked dumbly at Kingdon as he spoke, and, as the little trading-agent went nearer, he saw that the A. D. C.'s face was twitching and that his forehead was heavy with perspiration.

"Yes. I understand he's pretty bad. But he'll pull through. Marlin isn't going out just yet."

"No?" Tonner grinned, and the cigaret dropped from his mouth. "Have you seen him? Have you?"

The final question was thick and antagonistic, as if he resented Kingdon's theory that Marlin was not going to die.

"Come in and sit down," Kingdon invited. "What would you like to drink? A little brandy?"

Tonner ignored the invitation to drink. But he walked straight to the couch, clumped down upon it and sat staring up at Kingdon in a stupid kind of amaze.

"I'm not drunk," he informed his host simply enough. "Just rattled. You've never been—afraid—have you?"

This was pitiful. Tonner was looking at Kingdon as a child might look up at its older brother. And Kingdon, measuring Tonner's girth and height and the straight splendor of his body, wondered again, with the same pathetic kind of envy, at the mysterious creations of God.

"Oh, yes. I've been afraid—lots of times. Why?"

Tonner shook his head, stared dully for another few seconds and again shook his head, more slowly this time.

"No, you haven't. Not you. I could wring your ruddy little neck and twist your head off your body with one hand. But you wouldn't care. You're not afraid. You just look at me and—and, —— you, Kingdon, what do you see? What do you see when you look into me and through me like that?"

Tonner's voice was hoarsely-shrill and ready to crack. He leaned toward Kingdon suddenly as if he would leap at him and compel him to tell what he saw.

"*Sh!* Not so loud," Kingdon cautioned quietly, resting one hand on his desk. "My assistants may hear you."

Harth had heard Tonner's voice rise and he was now standing in the open doorway of his room looking inquiringly along the veranda. Then he walked to the rail and stayed there, leaning over. Balloch joined him on tiptoe a few seconds later.

"What is it?" the big beach clerk asked

"Don't know," Harth answered in a low monotone. "Sounds like Tonner in an ugly mood. Wait awhile."

Tonner did not rise. He said, "Oh" in a hollow voice and sat in a physical and mental slump for a space, looking unseeingly at the floor.

"What is it you wanted to tell me?" Kingdon suggested presently.

Tonner looked up.

"Have you seen Marlin?"

"No."

"He's yellow. Even the whites of his eyes. And he's going to die—that color! Isn't that devilish? Imagine a man dying yellow! Yellow!" Tonner laughed terribly.

Kingdon walked over to the couch and curled himself up at the head end of it.

"Marlin isn't going to die," he declared calmly. "And, in any case, jaundice isn't catching. You're not going to get it."

"No," dully. "I suppose not. In fact, you know, Kingdon, I'd prefer blackwater. The way Calby and the other chap got it. I didn't know it was quite as fast as all that. Why, it's almost as fast as a bullet."

"Almost," Kingdon agreed pleasantly. "But you've got only two weeks or so to go. So why go to all the trouble of having blackwater now? It's terribly weakening."

"Weakening?" Tonner thought that over. "Doesn't—doesn't one always die?"

"Not always. I had it and I'm still here."

"You!"

"Had it on my second trip. It broke me up a lot. But I got over it."

Tonner gaped. Then he reached out a hand and touched Kingdon's knee. The hand trembled and Tonner's voice quavered when he spoke again.

"What is it inside you that does it, Kingdon? I've been wondering about that a lot. You know, of course, that I am a most damnable quitter; I've always been that. But why? Why should I have a body like mine and the spirit of a louse? What use is my body to me? It's only a bluff. There's nothing behind it. I won't fight even when I'm cornered and a sheep will do that."

Kingdon nodded understandingly. But it was some little time before he could speak. The pity of the thing crushed down upon him like a dead, smothering weight.

"Perhaps you think too much about consequences," he suggested at last, and then gave Tonner a chance to talk the miserable business out of his system.

Tonner bent forward and looked more closely at Kingdon as if to make sure he was listening.

"Consequences? Yes, I suppose so. At school, I bought myself out of the only fight I couldn't run away from. Saved myself a thrashing with a two-shilling bit. I was cornered that time. And I was in the right, too. But I bought myself off, and I never see a two-shilling bit——"

He stopped there, removed his hand from Kingdon's knee, fumbled for his handkerchief aimlessly, and then forgot what he was looking for.

"Afterwards," he resumed thickly, "there were other instances. But they cost a little more. I joined the Army—the Grays. Tried to have it make me over and chose the cavalry because I'd always been afraid of horses. I had to buy myself out of that, too, as soon as they would let me." A pause. "One of the fellows was kicked in the stomach two weeks after I joined. I was only a yard away when it happened. Awful!"

Kingdon nodded. He saw that Tonner's eyes were becoming quieter.

"That wasn't a fair trial," he said simply. "You didn't have a chance that time."

Tonner rubbed the sweaty palms of his great hands hard together between his knees, and gave them all of his attention.

"After a while I went out to Canada. Joined the Northwest Mounted just to see how long I could stick it, and managed to go through eighteen months of routine without any trouble. Then, with two others, I had to raid a place and—well——"

He stopped, swallowed hard and added—

"I let them do the work."

Tonner grinned, and Kingdon felt a cold chill trickle down his spine.

"They were splendid fellows, too. Splendid. On the way back they—er—suggested that I send in my resignation."

Again Kingdon nodded, paused a moment, then asked—

"What made you think of coming out here?"

Tonner straightened a little. Apparently he did not resent the question.

"I came out here, away from everybody, to try to fight something I couldn't see—the climate, malaria, blackwater—that sort of thing. And I haven't been sick a minute."

He threw his hands out with a gesture of hopeless resignation.

"But it's got me in any case. You can see that can't you?"

Kingdon could see it plainly enough. He got down from his perch on the couch head.

"What you need most is sleep—about a week of it."

Tonner looked startled.

"How the —— do you know that?"

"Haven't slept much lately, have you? Not at all, possibly, since Calby went under?"

Tonner struggled to his feet and lurched toward Kingdon, who backed as far as the corner of his desk and stopped there.

"How do you know what I've been doing?" Tonner demanded thickly his voice rising higher than he knew. "Out with it! You —— little spy, if you've been bribing any one to watch me——"

And Kingdon, looking straight up at him, laughed; a small, soft sound that was like a blow.

"You talk and act like a man who hasn't slept for a month," he said gently, as Tonner stepped hesitatingly away.

The scuff of hurried rubber-soled feet came rapidly along the veranda. "And you've brought my assistants into the discussion. Better go along and see Farley. He'll give you some sleepy stuff."

Tonner turned his head as Harth and Balloch came into the doorway. Both were evidently prepared for trouble, but Tonner, curiously enough, did not seem to be as much afraid of them as he was of Kingdon.

"What do you want?" he grunted.

Harth, who kept his wits about him, looked past Tonner and saw Kingdon shake his head.

"Nothing," Harth said briefly. "But perhaps it would be better if——"

"It's all right," Kingdon broke in quietly. "Tonner's just going. Aren't you, Tonner?"

The A. D. C. hesitated, regarded Harth from under lowering brows, shifted his glance to Balloch, then slowly grinned again. He had large, white teeth and he drew his lips away from them more like a wolf than a man.

"Don't see why these fellows should interfere," he grumbled surlily to Kingdon and shook himself together. "I wasn't—all right—I'll get along."

And with his customary abruptness, ignoring Harth and Balloch altogether, he passed out and down the stairs.

"What's the matter with him?" Balloch demanded at once. "Is he crazy?"

Kingdon called a house-boy and quietly ordered drinks. Neither then nor later did he say anything about Tonner. But Harth was not slow to observe that Kingdon did not drink lime-juice this time.

And when, shortly after eleven o'clock, Kingdon went softly down the stairs and turned in the direction of the consulate, Harth in pajamas and mosquito-boots, went still more softly after.

MOTHER MARLIN had lost interest. All conception of resistance had apparently left him, and nothing Dr. Farley could do seemed to be able to arouse in the half-conscious man a new desire for life.

And medicine, as the P. M. O. knew only too well, was tied hand and foot in such cases. When the doctor took his patient's pulse shortly after eleven o'clock, his expression hardened a little. He hated to lose a man without a fight.

Crawford of the P. W. D., half-asleep in a Madeira chair not far from the foot of the bed, stirred himself every now and then to be sure he was not neglecting anything. Farley and he would indulge in monotoned conversations of a sentence or two, after which the silence would fall again, more somber and hopeless than before.

Neither of them paid any attention to the vaguely restless sounds that emanated from the adjoining room—Tonner's room—sounds as of dragging feet that paced up and down, up and down, endlessly.

Occasionally, a visitor poked his head in at the door, asked a stereotyped, whispering question or two, offered to relieve Crawford, who always refused to be relieved, and then withdrew.

Kingdon was the latest caller. When he had thanked a house-boy for showing him up to the room, he entered noiselessly, made no excuses, nodded gravely to Crawford, to whom he had once loaned his shirt, glanced toward the bed and then drew Farley aside with a slight movement of the head.

"Still has a good chance, hasn't he?" he asked the doctor in a low voice.

"If he could be made to realize it," Farley agreed with an involuntary intonation of impatience.

Kingdon nodded understandingly, drew

the doctor a little farther away from the bed, then said in a still lower voice—

"I don't suppose you've seen Tonner in the past hour or two."

"No," gruffly. "He didn't take any of the sleeping-powders I gave him. What's he been doing now?"

"Oh, nothing. But I think he needs something more than sleeping-powders. Couldn't you invalid him home this week?"

"Pshaw!" Farley ridiculed. "He's only rattled. And two or three weeks more——"

"Will be too much for him."

"Hunh!" Farley grunted. "What's he been doing? Appointing you his father confessor?"

And, as if in answer to Farley's question, they heard a voice. It was hardly the voice of a man; more like that of a child who screams fearfully in the dark.

"Kingdon! Kingdon! I'm afraid!"

Farley's jaw dropped, and Crawford rose slowly, his expression indicating that he was not sure that he had heard aright.

Kingdon wheeled instantly toward the door, flung it open and disappeared into the hall. Then Farley said sharply to Crawford:

"That's Tonner. See what you can do."

There were others who heard Tonner's cry and among them was Harth who had carefully followed Kingdon to the top of the annex stairs, explaining to the house-boys that he was waiting for the little "cap'n."

He saw Kingdon come out of Marlin's room and go unhesitatingly into that from which the cry had come, and as Harth sped, with amazing swiftness for a man of his size, along the hall, he heard Kingdon call Tonner's name.

It was dark in the A. D. C.'s room. Tonner preferred it that way because it gave him a chance to get away from men and mirrors.

And out of that darkness, as soon as Kingdon vanished into it, there came a whine that ended in a snarl.

"Out!" Tonner screamed. "Out!"

And he drove Kingdon before him, out into the hall; this in spite of the fact that, less than half a minute before, he had called most piteously to Kingdon for help.

Then it was that Harth and Crawford and Farley and the rest knew that Tonner was not merely rattled.

Kingdon had been aware of it earlier in the evening; and now he backed away from the madman, unpleasantly cognizant of the circumstance that there was a service revolver in Tonner's right hand.

It was this that made Crawford, who had just reached Tonner's door by that time, also back down the hall just a little behind Kingdon; while Harth, observing this most dangerous development, paused before he reached Marlin's room, and went no farther. There was nothing he could do for Kingdon or Crawford then. He was too far away. The wisest and the hardest thing to do, under the circumstances, was to stand still.

Behind Harth, strung along the hall, were a P. W. D. man, a lieutenant of the W. A. F. F. and several house-boys.

Tonner paid no heed to these. The inside of his head resembled a crowded theater after a cry of fire. It was filled with a screeching, tearing, trampling stampede of ideas and terrors that tried to drown the whispering silence in Marlin's room; a silence that, for Tonner, was tinted with a significant orange hue.

And in the midst of it all he saw Marlin's lean yellow face, which reminded him of the fact that a man could really die—that color.

But, now he wanted to be sure of it. And because he believed that Kingdon and Crawford were trying to prevent him, he drove them before him into Mother Marlin's room and there, amid a quiet that did not even breathe, he peered straight at the bed.

For a little while nothing else mattered. Even the revolver became a thing of no consequence. It dangled at his side listlessly, and his whole body carried the same attitude of slouching indifference.

But no one made any attempt to rush upon him and try to deprive him of his revolver. It was much too risky with Marlin in the room.

Farley moved as unobtrusively as possible toward the bed in an effort to get between his patient and any sudden wildness Tonner might be guilty of, and Crawford did not, for a second, take his attention away from Tonner's face.

But Kingdon stood nearer to the madman than either of them and he went nearer.

"No!" Tonner said gutturally to himself, staring at Marlin. "No! Not—that color!"

His grip on the revolver tensed suddenly and, in the same instant, he saw Kingdon scarcely more than a yard away.

"What do you want? You —— little spy——"

His left hand reached out with snakelike quickness and clutched Kingdon's shoulder with all the mad power that was in his long, thick fingers. Even the pain of it was bad enough. But Kingdon's helplessness was infinitely worse. Ere any one could have moved a foot to go to his assistance, Tonner stuck the muzzle of his revolver hard into Kingdon's left side, directly over the heart.

"*Now—you're afraid!*"

The exultation in Tonner's face was awful to look upon. And it was true that Kingdon did look worried. His situation was truly desperate, because he caught a fleeting hint in Tonner's eyes of his latest-born intention. But—

"All right. I'll admit I'm badly scared this time. But don't do any shooting in here. Marlin deserves a fighting chance, you know."

Tonner's exultant look gave way to a sulky, savage one, as if he thought Kingdon was not afraid enough to suit him. And he was so intent upon this unpleasant phase of the matter that he did not hear Harth come into the doorway behind him, or note Farley's telltale expression when the big pajama-clad shop clerk appeared.

Harth scarcely paused. If he stopped to think, no one saw him do it. A single glance absorbed Kingdon's situation, and Harth made up his mind what to do while he was on his way to do it.

Speed and silence were the first essentials, and Farley gasped dangerously when he saw Harth move; but perhaps it was the look in the popping blue eyes that made the doctor gasp most. Evidently, in the placid, apparently untroubled depths of that man-mountain of fat and brawn, there were the seeds of madness, too.

The distance between him and Tonner vanished ere the doctor had a chance to draw another breath. And Harth did not close in standing up. His body crouched, so that when a large fat hand snatched unerringly for Tonner's right wrist and wrenched it sharply out and down, his shoulder dug into the small of the A. D. C.'s back as another large, fat arm curled about Tonner's waist.

Kingdon, whose expression had given Tonner no hint of Harth's devastating approach, was hurled backward several steps simply by the force with which Tonner released him. In another second, with a gurgling, choked off cry—and aided by one of Harth's heavy legs twisted about one of his—Tonner went down heavily upon his face, his gun-hand folded under him. Harth was on top, still gripping the wrist.

There was a snarling oath, a tremendous heaving of great bodies, a queer look in Harth's prominent eyes, and then—a shot.

The thunder of it deafened, and Crawford, going to Harth's assistance stopped short. Farley, quite involuntarily, put his hands up to his ears and glanced instinctively toward the bed. Marlin's head rolled and his eyes started into sudden life.

Harth rose slowly and backed somewhat apologetically from the twitching death upon the floor, as Kingdon, moving quickly toward it, got down on one knee.

Then he, too, rose and said simply—

"We'd better take him into his own room?"

No one else spoke; no one save Marlin.

"What—happened?" It was scarcely a breath, but it declared most emphatically that he was conscious enough to be inquisitive. Farley knew that the excitement might kill, but there was an equal possibility that it might cure. So he lied like the genius he was.

"Some one shot off a gun to wake you up. And you'll die if you don't. Understand?"

"Die?" Marlin repeated the word after a while as if he had been thinking it over. "What's—temperature?"

Farley lied about that, too, and after another lengthy pause Marlin grinned.

"Can—beat that—any time," he assured Farley, who was counting his pulse beats as a miser counts gold. "Not—going to die."

Again Marlin thought the matter over, and presently Farley heard him mutter slowly but distinctly, "Not—this—color."

Farley saw to it that he didn't.

They had laid Tonner upon his bed in his own room. The bullet had chosen his heart and had made a clean job of it.

To Kingdon, Tonner's straight and splendid body was even more magnificent since the spirit that had ruled it had been driven out.

Because the eyes stared, Crawford dipped down into his pocket and placed two coins upon the lids; and for a second or two Kingdon's thoughts stood still. Then he bent over and picked the coins up again.

"Don't use these," he said quietly. "Almost anything but these."

And he dropped the two-shilling pieces into Crawford's cupped palm.

SWEET APPLE JIMMY

by Patterson James

FROM Circle City to Juarez the booming timber town of Bereena was known as a wide open "burg" and Bereena admitted with mixed pride and shame that nothing could be wider than that section of itself known as The Gap. It was a lumberjack's concrete idea of Paradise, for the main street was lined on both sides from the edge of the lake to the fringe of jack pines marking the town's limits with an unbroken chain of saloons, and whatever species of diversion you wanted The Gap ladled it out so long as you had the price.

"Whisky Row's" plank sidewalks were scarred with millions of pockmarks from the caulked shoes of the rivermen who flooded it in Summer. When the first bite of Autumn brought them back from the harvest fields in Dakota to hire out for the Winter in the woods they stopped for a time to create a memory strong enough to last through the long hours of their exile in the timber. But when the Spring loosed the logging crews from the pine forests with a Winter's stake to shoot, The Gap roared like a primeval cataract.

Brazen-lunged pianos banged all night as the restless horde milled up and down the main "stem" taking a chance on every gambling game from stud poker to roulette, drinking everything from high priced red liquor to stuff that made you feel you had swallowed an angry wildcat, and kicking slivers out of the floors of the dance halls whenever the passion to shake a foot seized them.

But The Gap had merits as well as demerits. It never made embarrassing inquiries into any one's past, and it gave every man a chance to pick his own game. That was why it looked on with frank tolerance the night James Templeton Aberthorpe, from nowhere, lighted his gasoline torch and planted his soap box pulpit in front of Len Higgins' place for the first time. Street preachers were no novelty. Half a dozen sowers of the seed had come, looked the field over, and departed to more tillable acreage. The Gap listened casually to what they had to say and pursued the discordant tenor of its way.

But this man could not be merely tolerated. In the first place he looked more like a lumberjack than a preacher. His plump face and bull neck were tanned as brown as an Indian's. His stocky body with its big shoulders and sturdy legs would do credit to the huskiest driver on the river. His teeth shone white and clean when he smiled, which was often and good humoredly. His voice boomed like a log jam breaking and his hot earnestness had a heart reaching quality.

None of these things, however, attracted The Gap's fancy. The red-nosed comedian from the "Gem" honky-tonk listened to him on his opening night critically, as a possible competitor, and passed accurate if technical judgment on him.

"Sweet Apple Jimmy," copyright, 1922, by Patterson James.

"His stuff is new and he knows how to sell it," was his wise comment.

Certainly the version of the Fall of Man with which the stranger drew his first hearers and to which they listened like children at a fairy-tale telling, was not stereotyped.

"Did Satan Beelzebub, th' prince of devils, th' fust wise guy, pick out a mouth-puckerin', belly-gripin', collery-mobbus green crab when he went a-temptin' of Adam in th' Garden," he shouted. "Not much he didn't. He knowed, th' old boy did, that Adam had a sweet tooth, same as you an' me. So he staked Eve to th' puttiest, sweetest, juciest apple in th' hull orchard. That done all th' dirt, that one putty, big, juicy, sweet apple! An' it's th' sweet apples of sin that's bin raisin' —— inside of us ever since. Oh, th' apples of drink an' gamblin' an' stealin' an' wimmen is sweet but they sicken an' kill an' if you don't quit 'em th' angel with th' fiery sword is agoin' to shut th' gates of th' Garden slam on you fur ever an' ever."

There were no convulsive conversions when he finished. The only sawdust trail hit was the one that wound in and around Whiskey Row, but the speaker had laid in his first sermon the foundation for future attention. He had mounted his box a nonentity. He stepped down with one of the essentials for fame, a nickname, because forever after The Gap knew him only as "Sweet Apple Jimmy."

In a fortnight he knew every permanent resident by his first name. He had a genius for mixing. If he flayed the hide off his audience in front of Higgins' for its evil doing he saluted bartender and gambler with hearty friendliness. Strangest of all, he lifted his hat to the dance-hall girls, just as if they were what they were not, whenever he met them hurrying back to their wretchedness in the afternoon dusk before their five o'clock curfew chimed virtuously from the Court House tower. Nightly he made the rounds of Whiskey Row picking up "strays" as he called the unfortunates.

"Howdy, Sweet Apple. What'll it be?" was the bantering salutation the first month.

"Little of th' same!" was the smiling retort as he kept on going.

It did not take The Gap long to realize that neither ridicule nor contempt nor temptation had the power to check Sweet Apple an instant, and so the invitation part of the greeting was dropped abruptly. He displayed the medieval gift of distinguishing between the sinner and his sin. He pounded the demon rum without mercy, but he nursed Hank Wilson, the wildest woods boss that ever scourged a crew, through an unusually vivid attack of perennial delirium tremens when no one else could be bribed to go near him.

He put in eighteen hours a day for weeks working with a pike pole on the sorting gap in all kinds of weather so that the wife and children of French Pete might eat while the husband and father was in jail awaiting trial for robbing a drugged harvest hand in Larsen's back room. He ferreted out the fact that the bartender and not the Frenchman had done the stealing. He walked into the court the day of the trial and pleaded the prisoner's case so shrewdly that he got him off, the tipsy justice deciding after sleeping through the evidence that no one should be convicted on the testimony of a "squealer."

These things added to his fame as a friend in need, but there were no signs of an enlarged spiritual influence. His gasoline torch still burned on the corner. The soap box was his only pulpit. The real church that was to give dignity to his ministry was still only a hungry yearning in his heart.

The Gap was generous enough in its flush moments, but it seemed whenever he had scraped together enough money to make his dream seem a little less tenuous, some one who knew the shortcut to the charity hole in his pocket happened along with a story of immediate need and walked away with the foundation or the roof of his church. He was facing the tragic conclusion that he was destined to spend his life unhoused on Higgins' corner, when Hank Wilson came to his assistance by dying as suddenly and silently as he had lived noisily.

He bequeathed his little house, with its woodshed to his "dear friend and sure enough pal, Sweet Apple James," and so became involuntarily the founder of the First Independent Church of Bereena. The Gap looked on in amazement while the skilful, loving, tireless hands of the lay evangelist transformed the little house into a church and painted it a reproachful white.

Of course there never was a congregation, but Jimmy had a place to seat it when the time came. Besides, the woodshed, developing with slower attention into a tiny parsonage, made a more becoming abode than the room over the Ten Strike Café.

Here he lived waiting for his hour of opportunity with a stubborn patience that the most rosy-eyed optimist might reasonably have described as scarcely justified by the perspective.

> *BANG!* The roar of a Colt's forty-five filled The Last Chance saloon. *Crash!* The big bullet smashed into a thousand pieces the only lamp undestroyed by the road agent, and the place was plunged into darkness. The street door opened, letting in a flood of moonlight. A lithe shadow darted outside and pulled the door shut after it. With a rush the hangers-on stormed the door, but in vain. The bandit had barred it from the outside. A mocking laugh filtered through the barrier to the human ram, and the assault on the door was renewed. In a few minutes the door fell from the hinges and the crowd poured out. The long main street was deserted. Faintly the echo of a horse's hoofs racing to safety across the bridge over the cañon came to their ears. The Black Bandit of Bloody Bend had made good his boast.
>
> Who could overtake that fleet steed and his matchless rider! Raging, the plundered gamblers returned to their games. Outside the silence of the August night reigned supreme. Then from the darkness blanketing the Wells-Fargo office two figures detached themselves. Like twin Nemeses they picked up the Black Bandit's trail and melted into the shadows of the night in pursuit. It was our hero, Fog Horn MacInerney, and his faithful Chinese assistant, Ah Sid.
>
> (To be continued next week)

WITH a sigh of resignation and a stretch of his tensed body, Sweet Apple Jimmy put down his paper-backed book, wiped the sweat of excitement from his hands and glanced resentfully at the clock on the mantelpiece. While Fog Horn and Ah Sid were chasing the Black Bandit to his lair, he had to sit and wait for the whistle of the through freight calling for brakes as it struck the long grade outside of town.

Only when the first shrill note sounded could he grab his hat and rush to the water tank at the end of the railroad yard. The long line of cars would bump past slowly, and the caboose with Ed Crawford, the conductor, standing on the platform, would come up. Crawford would pass him a bundle of novels tied with a string, there would be just time for a hurried greeting between him and the only man in the county who understood and shared his love for the forbidden literary fruit of his boyhood. He would stand patiently and watch until the freight's tail lights were swallowed in the darkness as the engineer took the crossover onto the main line.

But his leashed curiosity invariably broke restraint about the time he got back to the gate at the end of the gravel walk leading to the parsonage where he would rip open the bundle to read the title pages of the treasure trove Crawford had left. After that came the lighted lamp, his glowing pipe, and a long night of glorious adventure.

It was the through freight's schedule and not a sense of shame that forced the exchange of thrillers in the darkness by the water tank. Sweet Apple Jimmy had no fear of giving scandal. The Gap was too busy picking its particular primroses to bother about his reading and long ago he had discovered what the people who lived in the section of town across the Great National tracks thought about him.

For Bereena was divided by the railroad into a social and moral sandwich.

North of the separating rails the godly section raised its bungalow roofs in smug appreciation of its own respectability and in virtuous contempt for the shacks which made the under side of the sandwich. The town proper had cement walks, brick buildings and a Chamber of Commerce. It had also three properly garbed, duly ordained ministers for its three regularly established churches. The Gap had nothing but its scarlet sins and Sweet Apple Jimmy.

And whatever The Gap did to the Ten Commandments, it held its preacher in respect, which was just what respectable Bereena did not do.

Once in the early days of his apostolate he had gone across the railroad tracks to them. He was heart-sick and soul-saddened by an incredible evil that thrived under his eyes. He wanted help and advice. He knew his story of "The Bodega" was told roughly in uncouth language and with slangy strangeness ill befitting even an unordained evangelist. But he knew what he had to say deserved attention from Bereena's first citizens. They answered him such a thing could not exist in a civilized community.

To the properly garbed, duly ordained preachers he was an ecclesiastical outlander, a freak, a semi-lunatic who thought he had a mission. His flaming story failed to singe their complacent indifference. He came back more heart-sick and soul-saddened than he had gone. From that day on he stopped thinking about the people across the railroad tracks at all. They were willing to believe anything of him, and surely the knowledge that he supplemented the salve he applied to his weary soul from the pages of the Undying Book with the mental tonic of a nickel novel whenever he felt unusually battered interiorly, would not appear strange to them. His literary relaxations were just more of his "goings-on."

Tonight he felt more depressed than ever, and a sense of his powerlessness smote him afresh as he laid down the first instalment of the Fog Horn thriller and, opening the door of the parsonage, stepped outside. What had he accomplished in eighteen months! A church that no one attended trying to check the torrent sweeping men and women to destruction under his very eyes. It seemed a long wait until the freight would whistle.

The warm breath of Spring came to him heavy with the scent of the pines. The lake, in the light of the full moon, shone like a silver mirror set in a deep, black frame made by the trees that grew down to the water's edge. The sky was bespangled with low hanging, softly shining stars. The full, fresh beauty of it all swept over him in a wave. Across the tracks godly Bereena had long ago gone to its bed.

Only The Gap shamed the loveliness of the night by the fever of its carnival and its indescribable murmur of many men moving in restless search for something to feed their long hunger. He sickened with a deeper feeling of failure as a low huddle of buildings at the edge of town sprang into sudden dominating brilliance. "The Bodega" was putting on her Jezebel jewels for the night.

The Bodega which had driven him across the tracks to godly Bereena, was taunting him with its impregnability. It was The Gap's citadel of vice, and Sweet Apple knew his way was blocked beyond passing as long as it stood untaken. The chains by which The Gap held its prisoners were forged by themselves willingly and they could be broken. But the sleek-bodied, soft-handed Greek who came down from the Yukon, bringing with him all the icy bloodlessness of the North to run The Bodega permitted no freedom to his creatures. Once they entered under his roof they became his slaves in fact.

The dance hall, opening on the roadway, faced the railroad tracks and formed one side of a rectangle, the remaining three sides of which were enclosed by a twenty-foot stockade topped with half a dozen strands of barbed wire. Inside the fence was turned loose a pack of sled dogs kept in purposeful starvation. The screams of women trying to escape, the snarling of famished beasts worrying their prey, and long, horrible silence came across its awful top at night.

Even The Gap, hardened to most things, shuddered at the knowledge of what went on back of the sullen wire-capped fence, but kept silent. Only Sweet Apple dared to cry futilely against it. Scarcely more than a week ago he stood on the sidewalk and watched Jew Minnie's funeral winding down the hill from "The Bodega's" door. He clenched his big fists as the pasty-faced proprietor rolled past him in a hack, sneering from the open window and smoking his inevitable cigaret.

Jimmy knew that under the girl's glossy hair there was a carefully hidden bullet hole and that she had put it there herself. The women who stood beside the open grave and sobbed so bitterly while the coffin was being lowered made that night uproarious in the futile effort to keep from wondering which of them would follow closest on Minnie's pilgrimage.

It all came back to him as the piano in the dance hall taunted him across the darkness with the mocking verse of a bawled out song—

"This is the life,
This is the life,
This is the life for me-e-e!"

Why didn't the heavens open and pour down fire and brimstone as they did on Sodom and Gomorrah! Would the destroying rain from above never come!

"How long, O Lord, how long," Sweet Apple pleaded passionately, raising his arms aloft.

The sound of footsteps running down the gravel path from the gate broke in on his prayer. There was the urge of fear and pressing need in their beat. No trivial errand brought a caller to him at this hour of the night. There was a quick rush of skirts around the corner of the church and a quickly stifled scream of surprize as the running woman caught sight of his figure in the doorway.

"Gee, you scared me," she panted. "You look like a ghost standing there in the moonlight."

"What's on your mind, miss," asked Sweet Apple. "Some one hurted?"

She waited for an instant until she caught her breath.

"There's something I've got to tell you," she hurried. "It's a matter of life and death. Please let me in before any one sees me. I've only got a minute."

She followed him into the house and waited with her back against the door until he turned up the light. By its flame he saw a slender, dark haired girl in a black and yellow striped dress, the skirt of which came to her knees. With awkward modesty she tried to draw her long coat tighter about her neck, but she could not hide the gleam of white flesh from the low-cut bodice. Her lips and cheeks were heavily rouged, and her eyebrows darkly pencilled. He knew her instantly for what she was, and his forehead knitted in sudden suspicion.

A girl from the dance halls in his parsonage at midnight! The Gap would be swift and harsh in its judgment if it became known. He knew that no one demands such virtue in a saint as a sinner does. Impulsively he started for the door. The girl read his thoughts in the action and checked him with her hand.

"Wait a minute," she begged. "Give me a chance to explain. It's all right."

"What did you come here fur?" he asked.

The girl stared at him in surprize—

"Why, where else would I go?" she said, simply. "You're all there is here. For God's sake let me tell you what I have to say before you turn me out."

He scratched his chin uncertainly.

"Oh, you're safe with me," she blazed at him. "I don't have to go hunting men."

Steadily he looked into her eyes, and she returned the look as steadily. He could see nothing but desperate anxiety in her eager face, and he set aside his fears.

"I 'pologize, miss," he said. "Will you set down?"

"He's got another," she blurted out. "He brought her from Minneapolis two days after Minnie was buried. She's going to kill herself tonight if she don't get away."

"Who's got who? Aleck the Greek?"

She nodded.

"She hasn't had a mouthful to eat since he brought her except a few scraps I got to her. He's got her locked up and he'll starve her and beat her regularly until she breaks. He let me in to see her, thinking I'd coax her. She's going to kill herself tonight if she don't get away."

She wrung her hands piteously.

"Hush, miss, hush. Lemme talk a bit."

"I will, I will," she agreed, "only hurry up."

"You want me to get a woman outa that hell hole when she walked plumb into it with her eyes wide open?" began Jimmy. "Is that what you want me to do?"

"But her eyes weren't open," protested the girl, earnestly. "Oh, I know all about that white slave stall," she hurried on. "Do you suppose I'd be here doing what I am for a girl like that? Aleck'll kill me when he finds out, but I can't help it. I rather he would than go through what I did with Minnie."

"Ain't she reached th' age o' reason yit?" pursued Sweet Apple. "Arter all's said an' did, no one can't be saved onless they wants to!"

"I tell you he got her in an employment office! She ran away from her home on a farm up in Dakota. She wanted to see the world. He told her he wanted her to do dining-room work in a big hotel he was opening up for the summer. She doesn't know anything about anything. She's just a big, beautiful cow of a girl that couldn't help herself if she got the chance. She never suspected until he got her inside The Bodega, and you know what chance she's got now. He'll break her if she lives long enough."

"But if she's a good girl an' wants to stay so, Aleck can't—"

Her gesture of fierce contempt interrupted him—

"That kind of talk is all right for people that write books on this thing," she flared bitterly. "But saying a thing can't happen doesn't keep it from happening. We're not all made of iron. I'm surprized at you. You've been around here long enough to know what starvation and beating and shame will do to a woman. And if you don't know——"

Her voice broke pitifully and her eyes filled with tears as she caught her trembling lip between her teeth until it bled.

"I do. My God, I know."

She paced the floor, weeping bitterly. Sweet Apple let her cry.

"Yo're right, miss," he said sadly, "I guess I'm as stupid as the rest."

"Just before I came away she said she was going to do it tonight, somehow," she harked back to the obsessing idea. "She broke a drinking glass in her room and said she'd do it with that. I couldn't stand it so I came to you. You've got to get her out. No one else has the nerve. Every time I think about her I can see her lying with her throat all cut and torn with that broken glass, and blood over everything. And she'll do it, she's that kind. She'll do it," she cried shrilly.

The preacher shook her gently by the shoulders until she grew quieter—

"Don't take on that way, miss. 'Twont do no good. Ef we're goin' to git her out we're goin' to need all our wits. Set still a minnit an' lemme think."

Minute after minute ticked from the clock on the mantlepiece and still he sat silent with bowed head. His powerful shoulders were hunched forward under the tensity of his thoughts, his thumb-stained Testament clutched in his linked fingers.

"Light, O Lord, light fur my blinded eyes," he begged with all the persistency of a child.

No answer came to his prayer. The girl shifted impatiently.

"Are you going to sit there all night?" she asked.

No light! No message! He raised his head sadly. The crudely colored cover of the Fog Horn MacInerney adventures scoffed at him from the table. He picked it up idly and the leaves fell open at the last page. He looked at the words printed there, dully at first, and then with quickening interest. For a full minute he stood wavering. Then he dropped the book and turned to the waiting girl. There was the set of grim decision in his jaw.

"You better be goin' along," he said quietly. "I think I kin fix this all right."

"Oh, I'm so glad," she whispered.

Her face glowed with relief as she drew her coat around her and came nearer to him.

"I don't trust any man," she told him slowly, "but I'm counting on you. Can I do anything? Can I help any way?"

He shook his head.

"Only thing you kin do is fergit you ever come here. 'Fraid to go back to th' Bodega?"

"Not much! Good night!" she called softly from the door.

There was no answer, and as she passed the window she stopped a second to look in. Sweet Apple was on his knees rummaging in an old trunk of Hank Wilson's. If she had waited a little longer she would have seen him fish up from the bottom of the trunk an ancient, ugly Colt's revolver, rusty from disuse.

There was one cartridge in the cylinder. Diligently he set to work with oil and rags to put the weapon in order. When it worked to suit him he busied himself with other things involving a scissors and a piece of black cloth. When everything was ready he turned out the light, locked the door, and put the key on the window-sill under the tomato can holding the geranium.

THERE was a wide disagreement among the witnesses at the police hearing the following afternoon over the physical make-up of the stranger who administered to The Gap the worst shock it had ever experienced. Some said he was short and blond, while others with equal certainty swore he was tall and dark, "like an Eyetalian."

However, at precisely twelve-forty when the evening was just entering its merry shank, a masked man pushed through the entrance of The Bodega and closed the sections of the heavy door after him. He carried a broken peavey stock in one hand and shoved it through the handles of the doors, effectually locking them.

The floor was crowded with lumberjacks dancing wildly. Around the bar the crowd was two deep. Every man was trying to talk loud enough to be heard above the noise. The tables along the sides of the building were filled with bristle-bearded woodsmen in flannel shirts and stagged mackinaw breeches. They were drinking steadily in the company of short skirted, hard-eyed women who watched them appraisingly all the time they fought off rough demonstrations of affection with experienced dexterity. In and about, like restless hyenas patrolling a cemetery, city thieves, dressed as workers, prowled, searching for victims on whom to exercise their accomplished fingers.

Aleck, the proprietor, stood at the end of the bar talking to the girl Teeny, who had visited Sweet Apple earlier in the night. One stony eye kept watch on the bartenders while the other took in every action of the women at the side tables. A thick cigaret was stuck between the fingers of one diamond ringed hand and he listened idly to the girl's chatter without once turning his head to look at her. The piano had just brought a hurricane waltz to a finish, and the thirsty dancers were streaming to the bar when suddenly Teeny screamed and clutched the Greek by the arm. He shook himself free angrily, but she screamed again and pointed to the door. As one man the room followed her gesture. Out of the darkness there came a bellow.

"Hands up! Everybody!" roared the intruder.

On the command every hand in the room went ceilingward.

"Line up against that wall."

The direction was emphasized with a wave of the monstrous revolver he held carelessly in his hand—

"Yo're so putty I ain't got the heart to look at you. Who's th' push of this joint?"

The Greek turned a livid face to him.

"All right," commented the stranger. "Pass over that jingle box an' don't reach into it fur nothin'."

Loose-lipped with fright, Aleck placed the cash drawer on a table under the visitor's eye.

"So fur so good," chuckled the hold-up man. "Alluz bizness afore pleasure. Now, ladies, if you please. Sashay out into th' middle so's I kin look you over."

Crying hysterically or boldly defiant, the girls did as they were told.

"Crows, every one of you," jeered the masked man. He spat contemptuously—

"Is this all of you they is?"

He shot the question at Teeny, and she looked questioningly at the Greek.

"Ho, ho, so that's it, hey!" interpreted the stranger. "Hidin' out on me! Got a prize-winner tucked away somewheres. Go get her!"

The Greek started for the living quarters.

"Not you," came the snarl from behind the mask. "You stay where I put you or I'll make a screen door outa that belly of your'n. I'm callin' th' numbers fur this dance. Woman, go git that queen bee an' be quick about it."

She disappeared on the errand.

"I got three or four more calls to make afore mornin'," explained the robber, helping himself to the cash box.

There was a scuffle in the hallway outside the dance room as Teeny returned dragging with her a sullenly resistant girl, younger than any in the place. She was just as she had been described, a beautiful cow of a girl, wilful faced, big bosomed, and carrying a mass of dull red hair piled on her head. Her big blue eyes smoldered, and every drop of clean country blood had flown into her cheeks. In contrast to the other women she looked like a blooming peony in a garden of fading roses.

"That's suthin' like it," complimented the wearer of the black mask. "I allus liked 'em corn fed. Come on, you."

He seized the girl with one hand and started for the door. Against his strength she was powerless, but she pulled away from him doggedly. He slapped her sharply across the face.

"Quit that," he ordered. "Don't you know when yo're bein' treated like a lady. Maybe you'd ruther stay here."

Instantly her resistance ceased.

The long shrill shriek of the through freight's whistle calling for brakes on the down grade coming into the railroad yard split the silence. The bandit jerked the peavey stock out of the door handles, threatening the girl with it.

"Come on quiet or I'll brain you," he breathed in her ear.

A scream of warning broke from Teeny and the intruder whirled in his tracks. The Greek was fumbling desperately for something hidden in the waistband of his trousers. The bandit, aiming at the big cluster of lights that hung from the center of the ceiling, pulled trigger. The hammer fell on an empty chamber as a stream of fire flowed from the automatic in the proprietor's too eager hand. The men facing the wall flopped to the floor with a long yell of fright. Again the hold-up man pulled trigger and again an empty chamber answered. He flung the weapon from him with all his strength and it smashed into the cluster of lamps like an exploding shell.

Before the pieces and the blazing oil hit the floor he had stepped through the door and shoved the peavey stock through the heavy iron handles outside. A mighty grunt sounded as the flying mass within hit the barrier. Down the street a lone policeman on the corner, schooled to enter the Bodega only when invited by the owner, heard the racket and turning on his heel sauntered away from trouble.

Once outside, the bandit's bellowing voice grew gentle—

"This way, miss," he urged. "There ain't nothin' to be afraid of. I come to git you away."

For an instant she hesitated and then as the attack on the door grew fiercer she took the hand he extended.

"I had to put that slap in to make it seem real, miss," he explained, hurriedly, as they dashed across the street into the darkness of the freight yard.

Down into the borrow pit they ran, putting the shoulder of the embankment between them and the town. As they stumbled over rejected ties scattered along the right of way and floundered in and out of culvert holes the uproar from the Bodega grew louder. On they raced down the track, spurred by the sudden yell that rose when the dance hall door gave way and the inmates poured out. Behind them the incoming freight thundered over the switch points at the far end of the yard and rushed its moving barrier between them and possible pursuit. The friendly outline of the water tank shot into view under the engine's headlight.

"Thank God," exclaimed the masked man.

The girl staggered and fell headlong—

"I can't go on," she faltered.

"Yes, you kin, miss," encouraged her companion. "It's only a step. Can't quit now."

She reeled to her feet, and he dragged her on up the embankment into the shelter of the water tank. She leaned against him weakly, and he could feel her body quiver as the sobs racked her from head to foot.

"Listen, miss," he broke out as the train drew closer. "I ain't only got a minnit. This train is goin' to Minneapolis an' yore goin' on it. A friend of mine'll look after yuh! Yo're goin' straight home an' stay there! Understand?"

"Yes, sir," sobbed the girl.

"Are you cured right? Are you ever goin' to run away an' get into trouble like this agin?"

"No, sir!"

"Sure?"

"Yes, sir."

And he knew she would do exactly as he told her because she was that kind of girl. He crushed a fistful of bills into her hand as the lights of the caboose drew down on them.

"This money belongs to Aleck, but I guess yo're entitled to enough to git you back home," he said. "I'll see he get's his change later."

TED CRAWFORD, the conductor, standing on the step of the caboose with a bundle of novels in one hand and a lantern in the other pulled back with a yell as the masked man stepped out of the darkness and walked alongside the moving train.

"What the—" began the conductor.

The bandit lifted his mask so that the light of the lantern fell full on his face.

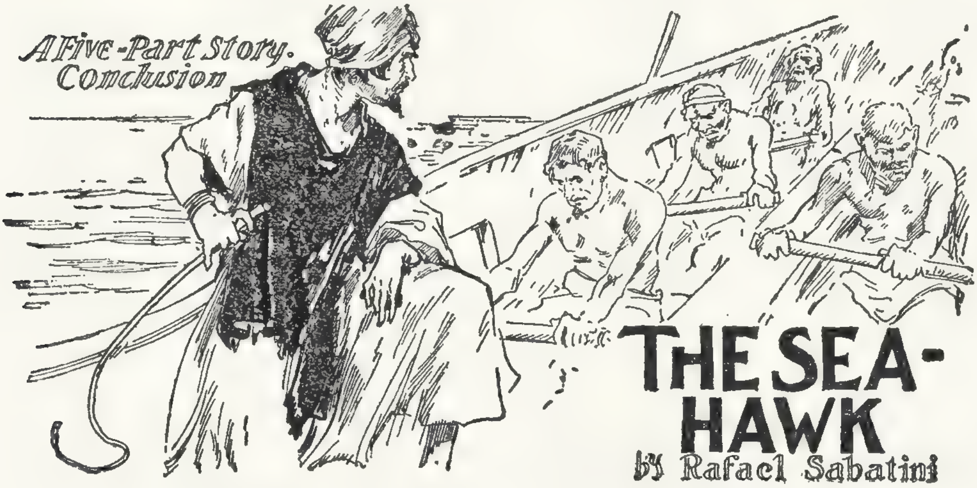
"I'll swap her fur that bundle you got in yore hand," he growled, handing the girl up the step of the caboose. "She's in a hurry to get away an' so am I. She'll tell you th' story later. So long!"

He stepped back and watched the train as it rolled past the crossover on to the main line, gathering speed swiftly. The figure of the girl standing beside the perplexed conductor jutted out clear and distinct in the light of Crawford's lantern. She waved her hand good-by to the rescuer, and the darkness blotted out the picture on the caboose platform. He waited until the tail lights were lost in the distance before he took the mask from his face and looked back the way they had come. A blazing light was eating eagerly through the Bodega's flimsy roof and the fire alarm bell was ringing insistently from the tower of the town hall.

"Even as Sodom and Gomorrah it burns," said the hold-up man aloud, baring his head to the freshening wind.

He picked his way slowly across the trestle to the sorting gap, wrapping the mask around a sizable stone as he went. There was a soft splash as it fell to oblivion in thirty feet of water. He walked on briskly until he came to the gate at the end of the gravel walk leading to the parsonage of the First Independent Church of Bereena. There he stopped and broke the string that held together the bundle of books he had taken from Crawford's hand. The light of the moon and the blaze from the Bodega burning to the ground made easily discernible the titles on the first novel that came to his hand.

"The Adventures of Fog Horn MacInerney. Part Two," the bold letters spelled. A smile of boyish eagerness wiped away the grimy weariness from the face of Sweet Apple Jimmy as he went on into the house and lighted the lamp.



A Five-Part Story. Conclusion

THE SEA-HAWK

by Rafael Sabatini

Author of "The Rebels Convict," "Captain Blood's Dilemma," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

IT SEEMED that all things came to Sir Oliver Tressilian. He had achieved honor on the Spanish Main; had been knighted by England's Virgin Queen, and his wooing of Mistress Rosamund ran a true course save that it was opposed by her brother, Peter, and by Sir John Killigrew, her guardian. The latter, Sir Oliver "pinked" in a duel and Sir John in some part withdrew his objections.

Rosamund, fearing that the impetuous Peter would provoke Sir Oliver to a duel, asked Sir Oliver to avoid him. This he did until one day, by chance, he met Peter at the village smithy.

"You dog!" Peter cried and struck Sir Oliver with his whip.

Then, with a drunken laugh, Peter rode off and Sir Oliver followed in furious pursuit. But shortly, remembering his promise to Rosamund, he checked his course and rode home.

That night Lionel, Sir Oliver's half-brother, confessed that he had killed Peter in a duel, and that he himself had been wounded. They had fought in the dark, without witnesses. It would be called murder. No one must know. Sir Oliver promised to keep silent.

Next morning rumor had it that Sir Oliver had killed Peter.

"There are those who heard you vow his death," cried Rosamund when he protested his innocence. "From where he lay they found a trail of blood to your door. Will you still lie?"

Taking with him certain men Sir Oliver went before a justice and exhibited his body. It bore no mark of recent wounds, was a mute witness to his innocence, and the justice indited a document so testifying.

Lionel, small of soul, fearing that the death of Peter would yet be charged to him, hired Jasper Leigh to trepan Sir Oliver away from England on his ship the *Swallow*.

His plan was successful and Sir Oliver's apparent flight confirmed belief in his guilt.

Master Leigh later told Sir Oliver of Lionel's treachery and offered to take him home on payment of a certain sum. Sir Oliver agreed and the order was given to "put about."

But the *Swallow*, having sailed too close to the coast, was attacked and sunk by a Spanish ship.

Sir Oliver and Jasper Leigh were rescued by the Spanish and sentenced to labor at the oars as galley slaves, Sir Oliver being sent to a ship of fifty oars.

For six months he experienced the tortures of hell and, in his bitterness, cursed all Christians.

"I renounce them all from this hour," he said with an obscene oath.

"Verily we are God's," said Yusuf, a Moslem slave. And so commenced a friendship between the two men.

When the Spanish ship was attacked by four Moslem galleys, Sir Oliver and Yusuf escaped from their chains and joined the fight.

"By Allah!" said the Moslem leader to Sir Oliver when all was over, "was there ever such a fighter?"

Urged thereto by Yusuf, Sir Oliver embraced the Moslem faith and, because of his valor, became commander-in-chief of Asad, the Basha. Men now called him Sakr-el-Bahr, the Hawk of the Sea.

Having sent an English captive home with a letter to Rosamund—telling her of Lionel's treachery and of the document which would prove his innocence—he was disheartened later to hear that Rosamund had thrown his letter, and the document, into the fire—unread.

Five years passed and he again received word from England. He had been presumed dead; Lionel had succeeded him; Lionel was betrothed to Rosamund.

Capturing a Spanish ship on which Jasper Leigh was a slave, Sir Oliver persuaded that man to turn Moslem and to sail the ship to England.

Lionel he found feasting with Rosamund and carrying them both aboard his vessel he set sail for Algiers.

There he found that Fenzileh, the Basha's Italian wife, had poisoned Asad's ear against him.

Sir Oliver asked that the two English slaves be given him.

"Nay," replied the Basha. "Deliver them to the bagnio. They will be sold on the morrow."

"It shall be done," said Sir Oliver. But he gave orders that Rosamund and Lionel should be kept apart from the other slaves until the hour of sale.

Early the next morning the Basha visited the market place. His eyes at once alighted on Rosamund and he ordered his *wazeer* to bid a thousand philips for her.

News of this was brought to Fenzileh and she, fearing that the Basha meant to put Rosamund in her place, bade her *wazeer* to offer fifteen hundred philips for the girl.

Lionel was one of the first to be offered for sale. He was sold to Othmani, Sir Oliver's henchman, for five philips.

A beautiful Spanish girl was sold, after much bargaining, to a Jew. When he sought to carry her off, she killed herself with a dagger.

"She has shown me the way," muttered Rosamund. "Surely God will give me the means."

So comforted she offered no resistance when her time came.

Bidding was now fast and furious, rising quickly to the limit set by the Basha.

"One thousand and one hundred philips!" Fenzileh's wazeer cried triumphantly.

"One thousand six hundred philips!" shouted a new comer.

It was Sakr-el-Bahr and there were no other bidders.

"Come!" he said to Rosamund.

She cowered against the wall.

"Cover her face," he bade his Nubian attendants, "and bear her to my house."

That night Sir Oliver, by clever questioning, trapped Lionel into confessing his guilt.

"It was for love of you, Rosamund," Lionel cried.

But she turned on him contemptuously.

"Take him away," growled Sir Oliver. "Chain him to one of the oars of my galley."

But Rosamund's attitude toward Sir Oliver did not soften.

"Are you not," she said, "become a heathen and a robber, a renegade and a pirate? Have you not sacrificed your God to your vengeful lust?"

Came now Fenzileh.

"None saw me enter," she said and stilled his alarm. "I come about the slave you purchased. Wilt sell her for three thousand philips?"

"Not for thirty thousand. She is not for sale. She shall never usurp thy place beside Asad."

"Fool!" she answered. "Asad will take her whether she is for sale or no."

The stillness of the night was broken by the tramp of marching men.

"Asad comes now," she cried. "He must not find me here. He would kill me."

"Take cover in the courtyard until he shall have passed," said Sakr-el-Bahr.

"Thou'lt not relinquish the girl?"

"Be at ease," he answered, and she departed satisfied.

HARDLY had she departed when Asad entered. "I come in haste," he said, "for the Frankish pearl. Thou'lt yield her up to me, my son?"

"Nay, lord; she is not for sale."

"Must I take her by force?" roared the Basha.

"While I live not even that mayest thou do."

"Wait!" said the Basha, and on that threatening note he departed.

Anon he returned with armed force and demanded the girl.

Sir Oliver took her hands in his and said—

"In Allah's Holy Name, before thee, Asad, and in the presence of these witnesses, I take this woman to be my wife."

And Asad, too devout a Moslem to separate these twain united in the Faith, turned abruptly to his followers.

"Away!" he commanded and stalked out in their wake.

And now Fenzileh, having the welfare of her son, Marzak, at heart, sought to embitter Asad against Sakr-el-Bahr.

"The faithless hound!" she cried. "He dared to thwart thee in thy desires?"

In the morning as Sakr-el-Bahr was about to set out in his galley Asad and the youth Marzak came aboard.

"We go with thee," said Asad and wondered greatly at Sakr-el-Bahr's discomfiture.

They set sail, Asad, Marzak and Sakr-el-Bahr on the poop, reclining on luxuriant cushions, while Lionel, chained to an oar, screamed at the cut of the boatswain's whip.

Now on the waist-deck near the mainmast stood a large palmetto bale.

"That," said Marzak, "seems oddly in the way. Were it not best to stow it in the hold?"

"Nay," answered Sakr-el-Bahr. "It would better become thee to observe and learn."

And so days passed—and there was continual wordy strife between these two—and the galley at lost came to anchor in a secluded cove there to await its prey.

And now Marzak taunted Sakr-el-Bahr and, fitting a shaft to his bow, aimed at the palmetto bale.

"Hold!" roared Sakr-el-Bahr. "Loose thy shaft at that bale and I will loose mine at thy throat."

"*Kellamullah!*" Asad bellowed. "Art mad, O Sakr-el-Bahr?"

"Mad indeed," answered Marzak. "Ask him what he keeps in that bale."

"Open the bale," blazed Asad, now in a towering passion.

The ropes were quickly slashed, and shortly was disclosed the form of Mistress Rosamund Godolphin.

Then Sakr-el-Bahr, secure in the knowledge that at least half of the crew were his men, told Asad that he purposed returning Rosamund to England.

"The maiden is no longer thine," said Asad. "She is for any Moslem who can take her."

"Such a Moslem," returned Sakr-el-Bahr, "will be nearer my sword than Paradise."

"Dost threaten?" cried Asad.

"I prophesy," sneered Sakr-el-Bahr.

Yet for all his brave words he knew that the Basha would call him to an accounting, and he dared not force the issue.

Time passed. In some part Sakr-el-Bahr won back Rosamund's faith and love, telling her the cause of things, explaining the trials which had beset him.

And now came word that an English galleon of twenty guns was anchored at the entrance to the cove. It was Sir John Killigrew's ship, the *Silver Heron,* in which that knight had sailed in search of Rosamund.

Marzak, showing his coward spirit, begged that they up anchor and escape before morning and the English ship discovered them. His plea was taken up by the crew.

But Sakr-el-Bahr, by much cunning arguments, prevailed upon Asad to stay. This he did hoping to get word to Sir John of Rosamund's presence.

But she misread his motives.

"What game do you play here, sir?" she said scornfully. "You tell me one thing and show me by your actions that you desire another."

"I do but ask you to save your judgment for the end," he answered. "If I live I shall deliver you."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MESSENGER

FOR the rest of the day she kept the cabin, chafing with anxiety to know what was toward and the more racked by it because Sakr-el-Bahr refrained through all those hours from coming to her. At last towards evening, unable longer to contain herself, she went forth again, and as it chanced she did so at an untimely moment.

The sun had set, and the evening prayer was being recited aboard the galeasse, her crew all prostrate. Perceiving this, she drew back again instinctively, and remained screened by the curtain until the prayer was ended. Then putting it aside, but without stepping past the Nubians, who were on guard, she saw that on her left Asad-ed-Din with Marzak, Biskaine, and one or two other officers was again occupying the divan under the awning. Her eyes sought Sakr-el-Bahr, and presently they beheld him coming up the gangway with his long, swinging stride, in the wake of the boatswain's mates, who were doling out the meager evening meal to the slaves.

Suddenly he halted by Lionel, who occupied a seat at the head of his oar immediately next to the gangway. He addressed him harshly in the *lingua franca,* which Lionel did not understand, and his words rang clearly and were heard—as he intended that they should be—by all upon the poop.

"Well, dog? How does galley-slave fare suit thy tender stomach?"

Lionel looked up at him.

"What are you saying?" he asked in English.

Sakr-el-Bahr bent over him, and his face 'as all could see was evil and mocking. No doubt he spoke to him in English also, but no more than a murmur reached the straining ears of Rosamund, though from his countenance she had no doubt of the purport of his words. And yet she was far indeed from a correct surmise. The mockery in his countenance was but a mask.

"Take no heed of my looks," he was saying. "I desire them up yonder to think that I abuse you. Look as a man would who were being abused. Cringe or snarl, but listen. Do you remember once when as lads we swam together from Penarrow to Trefusis Point?"

"What do you mean?" quoth Lionel, and the natural sullenness of his mien was all that Sakr-el-Bahr could have desired.

"I am wondering whether you could still swim as far. If so you might find a more appetizing supper awaiting you at the end—aboard Sir John Killigrew's ship. You had not heard? The *Silver Heron* is at anchor in the bay beyond that headland. If I afford you the means, could you swim to her, do you think?"

Lionel stared at him in profoundest amazement.

"Do you mock me?" he asked at length.

"Why should I mock you on such a matter?"

"Is it not to mock me to suggest a way for my deliverance?"

Sakr-el-Bahr laughed, and he mocked now in earnest. He set his left foot upon the rowers' stretcher, and leaned forward and down his elbow upon his raised knee so that his face was close to Lionel's.

"For your deliverance?" said he. "God's life! Lionel, your mind was ever one that could take in naught but your own self. 'Tis that has made a villain of you. Your deliverance! God's wounds! Is there none but yourself whose deliverance I might desire? Look you now, I want you to swim to Sir John's ship and bear him word of the presence here of this galeasse and that Rosamund is aboard it. 'Tis for her that I am concerned, and so little for you that should you chance to be drowned in the attempt my only regret will be that the message was not delivered. Will you undertake that swim? It is your one sole chance short of death itself of escaping from the rower's bench. Will you go?"

"But how?" demanded Lionel, still mistrusting him.

"Will you go?" his brother insisted.

"Afford me the means and I will," was the answer.

"Very well." Sakr-el-Bahr leaned nearer still. "Naturally it will be supposed by all who are watching us that I am goading you to desperation. Act, then, your part. Up, and attempt to strike me. Then when I return the blow—and I shall strike heavily that no make-believe may be suspected—collapse on your oar pretending to swoon. Leave the rest to me. Now," he added sharply, and on the word rose with a final laugh of derision as if to take his departure.

But Lionel was quick to follow the instructions. He leaped up in his bonds, and reaching out as far as they would permit him he struck Sak-el-Bahr heavily upon the face. On his side, too, there was to be no make-believe apparent. That done he sank down with a clank of shackles to the bench again, whilst every one of his fellow-slaves that faced his way looked on with fearful eyes.

Sakr-el-Bahr was seen to reel under the blow, and instantly there was a commotion on board. Biskaine leaped to his feet with a half-cry of astonishment; even Asad's eyes kindled with interest at so unusual a sight as that of a galley-slave attacking a corsair. Then with a snarl of anger, the snarl of an enraged beast almost, Sakr-el-Bahr's great arm was swung aloft and his first descended like a hammer upon Lionel's head.

Lionel sank forward under the blow, his senses swimming. Sakr-el-Bahr's arm swung up a second time.

"Thou dog!" he roared, and then checked, perceiving that Lionel appeared to have swooned.

He turned and bellowed for Vigitello and his mates in a voice that was hoarse with passion. Vigitello came at a run, a couple of his men at his heels.

"Unshackle me this carrion, and heave it overboard," was the harsh order. "Let that serve as an example to the others. Let them learn thus the price of mutiny in their lousy ranks. To it, I say."

Away sped a man for hammer and chisel. He returned with them at once. Four sharp metallic blows rang out, and Lionel was dragged forth from his place to the gangway-deck. Here he revived, and screamed for mercy as though he were to be drowned in earnest.

Biskaine chuckled under the awning, Asad looked on approvingly, Rosamund drew back, shuddering, choking, and near to fainting from sheer horror.

She saw Lionel borne struggling in the arms of the boatswain's men to the starboard quarter, and flung over the side with no more compunction or care than had he been so much rubbish. She heard the final scream of terror with which he vanished, the splash of his fall, and then in the ensuing silence the laugh of Sakr-el-Bahr.

For a spell she stood there with horror and loathing of that renegade corsair in her soul. Her mind was bewildered and confused. She sought to restore order in it, that she might consider this fresh deed of his, this act of wanton brutality and fratricide. And all that she could gather was the firm conviction that hitherto he had cheated her; he had lied when he swore that his aim was to effect her deliverance. It was not in such a nature to know a gentle mood of penitence for a wrong done. What might be his purpose she could not yet perceive, but that it was an evil one she never doubted, for no purpose of his could be aught but evil. So overwrought was she now that she forgot all Lionel's sins, and found her heart filled with compassion for him hurled in that brutal fashion to his death.

And then, quite suddenly, a shout rang out from the forecastle.

"He is swimming!"

Sakr-el-Bahr had been prepared for the chance of this.

"Where? Where?" he cried, and sprang to the bulwarks.

"Yonder!"

A man was pointing. Others had joined him and were peering through the gathering gloom at the moving object that was Lionel's head and the faintly visible swirl of water about it which indicated that he swam.

"Out to sea!" cried Sakr-el-Bahr. "He'll not swim far in any case. But we will shorten his road for him."

He snatched a cross-bow from the rack about the mainmast, fitted a shaft to it and took aim.

On the point of loosing the bolt he paused.

"Marzak!" he called. "Here, thou prince of marksmen, is a butt for thee!"

From the poop-deck whence with his father he too was watching the swimmer's head, which at every moment became more faint in the failing light, Marzak looked with cold disdain upon his challenger, making no reply. A titter ran through the crew.

"Come now," cried Sakr-el-Bahr. "Take up thy bow!"

"If thou delayest much longer," put in Asad, "he will be beyond thine aim. Already he is scarcely visible."

"The more difficult a butt, then," answered Sakr-el-Bahr, who was but delaying to gain time. "The keener test. A hundred philips, Marzak, that thou'lt not hit me that head in three shots, and that I'll sink him at the first! Wilt take the wager."

"The unbeliever is forever peeping forth from thee," was Marzak's dignified reply. "Games of chance are forbidden by the Prophet."

"Make haste, man!" cried Asad. "Already I can scarce discern him. Loose thy quarrel."

"Pooh," was the disdainful answer. "A fair mark still for such an eye as mine. I never miss—not even in the dark."

"Vain boaster," said Marzak.

"Am I so?" Sakr-el-Bahr loosed his shaft at last into the gloom, and peered after it following its flight, which was wide of the direction of the swimmer's head.

"A hit!" he cried brazenly. "He's gone!"

"I think I see him still," said one.

"Thine eyes deceive thee in this light. No man was ever known to swim with an arrow through his brain."

"Aye," put in Jasper, who stood behind Sakr-el-Bahr. "He has vanished."

" 'Tis too dark to see," said Vigitello.

And then Asad turned from the vessel's side.

"Well, well—shot or drowned, he's gone," he said, and there the matter ended.

Sakr-el-Bahr replaced the cross-bow in the rack, and came slowly up to the poop.

In the gloom he found himself confronted by Rosamund's white face between the two dusky countenances of his Nubians. She drew back before him as he approached, and he, intent upon imparting his news to her, followed her within the poop-house, and bade Abiad bring lights.

When these had been kindled they faced each other, and he perceived her profound agitation and guessed the cause of it. Suddenly she broke into speech.

"You beast! You devil!" she panted. "God will punish you! I shall spend my every breath in praying Him to punish you as you deserve. You murderer! You hound! And I like a poor simpleton was heeding your false words. I was believing you sincere in your repentance of the wrong you have done me. But now you have shown me——"

"How have I hurt you in what I have done to Lionel?" he cut in, a little amazed by so much vehemence.

"Hurt me!" she cried, and on the words grew cold and calm again with very scorn. "I thank God it is beyond your power to hurt me. And I thank you for correcting my foolish misconception of you, my belief in your pitiful pretense that it was your aim to save me. I would not accept salvation at your murderous hands. Though, indeed, I shall not be put to it. Rather," she pursued, a little wildly now in her deep mortification, "are you like to sacrifice me to your own vile ends, whatever they may be. But I shall thwart you, Heaven helping me. Be sure I shall not want courage for that."

And with a shuddering moan she covered her face, and stood swaying there before him.

He looked on with a faint, bitter smile, understanding her mood just as he understood her dark threat of thwarting him.

"I came," he said quietly, "to bring you the assurance that he has got safely away, and to tell you upon what manner of errand I have sent him."

Something compelling in his voice, the easy assurance with which he spoke drew her to stare at him again.

"I mean Lionel, of course," he said in answer to her questioning glance. "That scene between us—the blow and the swoon and the rest of it—was all make-believe. So afterwards the shooting. My challenge to Marzak, was a ruse to gain time—to avoid shooting until Lionel's head should have become so dimly visible in the dusk that none could say whether it was still there or not. My shaft went wide of him, as I intended. He is swimming round the head with my message to Sir John Killigrew. He was a strong swimmer in the old days, and should easily reach his goal. That is what I came to tell you."

For a long spell she continued to stare at him in silence.

"You are speaking the truth?" she asked at last in a small voice.

He shrugged.

"You will have a difficulty in perceiving the object I might serve by falsehood."

She sat down suddenly upon the divan; it was almost as if she collapsed bereft of strength; and as suddenly she fell to weeping softly.

"And—and I believed that you—that you——"

"Just so," he grimly interrupted. "You always did believe the best of me."

And on that he turned and went out abruptly.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MORITURUS

HE DEPARTED from her presence with bitterness in his heart, leaving a profound contrition in her own. The sense of this her last injustice to him so overwhelmed her that it became the gage by which she measured that other earlier wrong he had suffered at her hands. Perhaps her overwrought mind falsified the perspective, exaggerating it until it seemed to her that all the suffering and evil with which this chronicle has been concerned were the direct fruits of her own sin of unfaith.

Since all sincere contrition must of necessity bring forth an ardent desire to atone, so was it now with her. Had he but refrained from departing so abruptly he might have had her on her knees to him suing for pardon for all the wrongs which her thoughts had done him, proclaiming her own utter unworthiness and baseness. But since his righteous resentment had driven him from her presence she could but sit and brood upon it all, considering the words in which to frame her plea for forgiveness when next he should return.

But the hours sped, and there was no sign of him. And then, almost with a shock of dread came the thought that ere long perhaps Sir John Killigrew's ship would be upon them. In her distraught state of mind she had scarcely pondered that contingency. Now that it occurred to her all her concern was for the result of it to Sir Oliver. Would there be fighting, and would he perhaps perish in that conflict at the hands either of the English or of the corsairs whom for her sake he had betrayed, perhaps without ever hearing her confession of penitence, without speaking those words of forgiveness of which her soul stood in such thirsty need?

BRITISH ISLES
ENGLISH CHANNEL
FRANCE
BAY OF BISCAY
ATLANTIC OCEAN
CAPE FINISTERRE
CAPE ROCA
LISBON
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
CADIZ
STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
ALGIERS
CAPE SPARTEL
ALGERIA
MOROCCO
AFRICA

It would be towards midnight when, unable longer to bear the suspense of it, she rose and softly made her way to the entrance. Very quietly she lifted the curtains, and in the act of stepping forth almost stumbled over a body that lay across the threshold. She drew back with a startled gasp; then stooped to look, and by the faint rays of the lanterns on mainmast and poop-rail she recognized Sir Oliver, and saw that he slept.

She never heeded the two Nubians immovable as statues who kept guard. She continued to bend over him, and then gradually and very softly sank down on her knees beside him. There were tears in her eyes—tears wrung from her by a tender emotion of wonder and gratitude at so much fidelity. She did not know that he had slept thus last night. But it was enough for her to find him here now. It moved her oddly, profoundly, that this man whom she had ever mistrusted and misjudged should even when he slept make of his body a barrier for her greater security and protection.

A sob escaped her, and at the sound, so lightly and vigilantly did he take his rest, he came instantly if silently to a sitting attitude; and so they looked into each other's eyes, his swarthy, bearded hawk face on a level with her white gleaming countenance.

"What is it?" he whispered.

She drew back instantly, taken with sudden panic at that question. Then recovering, and seeking woman-like to evade and dissemble the thing she was come to do, now that the chance of doing it was afforded her——

"Do you think," she faltered, "that Lionel will have reached Sir John's ship?"

He flashed a glance in the direction of the divan under the awning where the Basha slept. There all was still. Besides, the question had been asked in English. He rose and held out a hand to help her to her feet. Then he signed to her to re-enter the poop-house, and followed her within.

"Anxiety keeps you wakeful?" he said, half-question, half-assertion.

"Indeed," she replied.

"There is scarce the need," he assured her. "Sir John will not be like to stir until dead of night, that he may make sure of taking us unawares. I have little doubt that Lionel would reach him. It is none so long a swim. Indeed, once outside the cove he could take to the land until he was abreast of the ship. Never doubt he will have done his errand."

She sat down, her glance avoiding his; but the light falling on her face showed him the traces there of recent tears.

"There will be fighting when Sir John arrives?" she asked him presently.

"Like enough. But what can it avail? We shall be caught—as was said today—in such a trap as that in which Andrea Doria caught Dragut at Jerba, saving that whilst the wily Dragut found a way out for his galleys, here none is possible. Courage, then, for the hour of your deliverance is surely at hand."

He paused, and then in a softer voice humbly almost—

"It is my prayer," he added, "that hereafter in a happy future these last few weeks shall come to seem no more than an evil dream to you."

To that prayer she offered no response. She sat bemused, her brow wrinkled.

"I would it might be done without fighting," she said presently, and sighed wearily.

"You need have no fear," he assured her. "I shall take all precautions for you. You shall remain here until all is over and the entrance will be guarded by a few whom I can trust."

"You mistake me," she replied, and looked up at him suddenly. "Do you suppose my fears are for myself?"

She paused again, and then abruptly asked him—

"What will befall you?"

"I thank you for the thought," he replied gravely. "No doubt I shall meet with my deserts. Let it but come swiftly when it comes."

"Ah, no, no!" she cried. "Not that!" And rose in her sudden agitation.

"What else remains?" he asked, and smiled. "What better fate could any one desire me?"

"You shall live to return to England," she surprized him by exclaiming. "The truth must prevail, and justice be done you."

He looked at her with so fierce and searching a gaze that she averted her eyes. Then he laughed shortly.

"There's but one form of justice I can look for in England," said he. "It is a justice administered in hemp. Believe me, mistress, I am grown too notorious for mercy. Best end it here to-night.

"Besides," he added, and his mockery fell from him, his tone became gloomy, "bethink you of my present act of treachery to these men of mine, who whatever they may be, have followed me into a score of perils and but today have shown their love and loyalty to me to be greater than their devotion to the Basha himself. I shall have delivered them to the sword. Could I survive with honor? They may be but poor heathens to you and yours, but to me they are my sea-hawks, my warriors, my faithful gallant followers, and I were a dog indeed did I survive the death to which I have doomed them."

As she listened and gathered from his words the apprehension of a thing that had hitherto escaped her, her eyes grew wide in sudden horror.

"Is that to be the cost of my deliverance?" she asked him fearfully.

"I trust not," he replied. "I have something in mind that will perhaps avoid it."

"And save your own life as well?" she asked him quickly.

"Why waste a thought upon so poor a thing? My life was forfeit already. If I go back to Algiers they will assuredly hang me. Asad will see to it, and not all my sea-hawks could save me from my fate."

She sank down again upon the divan, and sat there rocking her arms in a gesture of hopeless distress.

"I see," she said. "I see. I am bringing this fate upon you. When you sent Lionel upon that errand you voluntarily offered up your life to restore me to my own people. You had no right to do this without first consulting me. You had no right to suppose I would be a party to such a thing. I will not accept the sacrifice. I will not, Sir Oliver."

"Indeed, you have no choice, thank God!" he answered her. "But you are astray in your conclusions. It is I alone who have brought this fate upon myself. It is the very proper fruit of my insensate deed. It recoils upon me as all evil must upon him that does it."

He shrugged his shoulders as if to dismiss the matter. Then in a changed voice, a voice singularly timid, soft, and gentle—

"It were perhaps too much to ask," said he, "that you should forgive me all the suffering I have brought you?"

"I think," she answered him, "that it is for me to beg forgiveness of you."

"Of me?"

"For my unfaith, which has been the source of all. For my readiness to believe evil of you five years ago, for having burnt unread your letter and the proof of your innocence that accompanied it."

He smiled upon her very kindly.

"I think you said your instinct guided you. Even though I had not done the thing imputed to me, your instinct knew me for evil; and your instinct was right, for evil I am—I must be. These are your own words. But do not think that I mock you with them. I have come to recognize their truth."

She stretched out her hands to him.

"If—if I were to say that I have come to realize the falsehood of all that?"

"I should understand it to be the charity which your pitiful heart extends to one in my extremity. Your instinct was not at fault."

"It was! It was!"

But he was not to be driven out of his conviction. He shook his head, his countenance gloomy.

"No man who was not evil could have done by you what I have done, however deep the provocation. I perceive it clearly now—as men in their last hour perceive hidden things."

"Oh, why are you so set on death?" she cried upon a despairing note.

"I am not," he answered with a swift resumption of his more habitual manner. " 'Tis death that is so set on me. But at least I meet it without fear or regret. I face it as we must all face the inevitable—the gifts from the hands of destiny. And I am heartened—gladdened almost—by your sweet forgiveness."

She rose suddenly, and came to him. She caught his arm, and standing very close to him, looked up now into his face.

"We have need to forgive each other, you and I, Oliver," she said. "And since forgiveness effaces all, let—let all that has stood between us these last five years be now effaced."

He caught his breath as he looked down into her white, straining face.

"Is it impossible for us to go back five years? Is it impossible for us to go back to where we stood in those old days at Godolphin Court?"

The light that had suddenly been kindled in his face faded slowly, leaving it grey and drawn. His eyes grew clouded with sorrow and despair.

"Who has erred must abide by his error—and so must the generations that come after him. There is no going back ever. The gates of the past are tight-barred against us."

"Then let us leave them so. Let us turn our backs upon that past, you and I, and let us set out afresh together, and so make amends to each other for what our folly has lost to us in those years."

He set his hands upon her shoulder, and held her so at arm's length from him considering her with very tender eyes.

"Sweet lady!" he murmured, and sighed heavily. "God! How happy might we not have been but for that evil chance——"

He checked abruptly. His hands fell from her shoulders to his sides, he half-turned away, brusk now in tone and manner.

"I grow maudlin. Your sweet pity has so softened me that I had almost spoke of love; and what have I to do with that? Love belongs to life; love is life; whilst I—*Moriturus te salutat!*"

"Ah no, no!" She was clinging to him again with shaking hands, her eyes wild.

"It is too late," he answered her. "There is no bridge can span the pit I have dug myself. I must go down into it as cheerfully as God will let me."

"Then," she cried in sudden exaltation. "I will go down with you. At the last, at least, we shall be together."

"Now here is mid-Summer frenzy!" he protested, yet there was a tenderness in the very impatience of his accents.

He stroked the golden head that lay against his shoulder.

"How shall that help me?" he asked her. "Would you embitter my last hour—rob death of all its glory? Nay, Rosamund, you can serve me better far by living. Return to England, and publish there the truth of what you have learnt. Be yours the task of clearing my honor of this stain upon it, proclaiming the truth of what drove me to the infamy of becoming a renegade and a corsair."

He started from her.

"Hark! What's that?"

From without had come a sudden cry:

"Afoot! To arms! To arms! *Holâ! Balâk! Balâk!*"

"It is the hour," he said, and turning from her suddenly sprang to the entrance and plucked aside the curtain.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SURRENDER

UP THE gangway between the lines of slumbering slaves came a quick patter of feet. Ali, who since sunset had been replacing Larocque on the heights, sprang suddenly upon the poop still shouting:

"Captain! Captain! My lord! Afoot! Up, or we are taken!"

Throughout the vessel's length came the rustle and stir of waking men. A voice clamored somewhere on the forecastle. Then the flap of the awning was suddenly whisked aside and Asad himself appeared with Marzak at his elbow.

From the starboard side as suddenly came Biskaine and Othmani, and from the waist Vigitello, Jasper—that latest renegade—and a group of alarmed corsairs.

"What now?" quoth the Basha.

Ali delivered his message breathlessly.

"The galleon has weighed anchor. She is moving out of the bay."

Asad clutched his beard, and scowled.

"Now what may that portend? Can knowledge of our presence have reached them?"

"Why else should she move from her anchorage thus in the dead of night?" said Biskaine.

"Why else, indeed?" returned Asad, and then he swung upon Oliver standing there in the entrance of the poophouse.

"What sayest thou, Sakr-el-Bahr?" he appealed to him.

Sakr-el-Bahr stepped forward, shrugging.

"What is there to say? What is there to do?" he asked. "We can but wait. If our presence is known to them we are finely trapped, and there's an end to all of us this night."

His voice was cool as ice, contemptuous almost, and whilst it struck anxiety into more than one it awoke terror in Marzak.

"May thy bones rot, thou ill-omened prophet!" he screamed, and would have added more but that Sakr-el-Bahr silenced him.

"What is written is written!" said he in a voice of thunder and reproof.

"Indeed, indeed," Asad agreed, grasping at the fatalist's consolation. "If we are ripe for the gardener's hand, the gardener will pluck us."

Less fatalistic and more practical was the counsel of Biskaine.

"It were well to act upon the assumption that we are indeed discovered, and make for the open sea while yet there may be time."

"But that were to make certain what is still doubtful," broke in Marzak, fearful ever. "It were to run to meet the danger."

"Not so!" cried Asad in a loud, confident voice. "The praise to Allah who sent us this calm night. There is scarce a breath of wind. We can row ten leagues while they are sailing one."

A murmur of quick approval sped through the ranks of officers and men.

"Let us but win safely from this cove and they will never overtake us," announced Biskaine.

"But their guns may," Sakr-el-Bahr quietly reminded them to damp their confidence.

His own alert mind had already foreseen this one chance of escaping from the trap, but he had hoped that it would not be quite so obvious to the others.

"That risk we must take," replied Asad. "We must trust to the night. To linger here is to await certain destruction."

He swung briskly about to issue his orders.

"Ali, summon the steersmen. Hasten! Vigitello, set your whips about the slaves, and rouse them."

Then as the shrill whistle of the boatswain rang out and the whips of his mates went hissing and cracking about the shoulders of the already half-awakened slaves, to mingle with all the rest of the stir and bustle aboard the galeasse, the Basha turned once more to Biskaine.

"Up thou to the prow," he commanded, "and marshal the men. Bid them stand to their arms lest it should come to boarding. Go!"

Biskaine salaamed and sprang down the companion. Above the rumbling din and scurrying toil of preparation rang Asad's voice.

"Cross-bowmen, aloft! Gunners to the carronades! Kindle your linstocks! Put out all lights!"

An instant later the cressets on the poop-rail were extinguished, as was the lantern swinging from the rail, and even the lamp in the poop-house which was invaded by one of the Basha's officers for that purpose.

The lantern hanging from the mast alone was spared against emergencies; but it was taken down, placed upon the deck and muffled.

Thus was the galeasse plunged into a darkness that for some moments was black and impenetrable as velvet. Then slowly as the eyes became accustomed to it this gloom was gradually relieved. Once more men and objects began to take shape in the faint, steely radiance of the summer night.

After the excitement of that first stir the corsairs went about their tasks with amazing calm and silence. None thought now of reproaching the Basha or Sakr-el-Bahr with having delayed until the moment of peril to take the course which all of them had demanded should be taken when first they had heard of the neighborhood of that hostile ship. In lines three deep they stood ranged along the ample fighting platform of the prow; in the foremost line were the archers, behind them stood the swordsmen, their weapons gleaming lividly in the darkness. They crowded to the bulwarks of the waist-deck and swarmed upon the ratlines of the mainmast. On the poop three gunners stood to each of the two small cannon, their faces showing faintly ruddy in the glow of the ignited match.

Asad stood at the head of the companion, issuing his sharp brief commands, and Sakr-el-Bahr, behind him, leaning against the timbers of the poop-house with Rosamund at his side, observed that the Basha had studiously avoided entrusting any of this work of preparation to himself.

The steersmen climbed to their niches, and the huge steering oars creaked as they were swung out. Came a short word of command from Asad and a stir ran through the ranks of the slaves, as they threw forward their weight to bring the oars to the level. Thus a moment, then a second word, the premonitory crack of a whip in the darkness of the gangway, and the tomtom began to beat the time. The slaves heaved, and with a creak and splash of oars the great galeasse skimmed forward towards the mouth of the cove.

Up and down the gangway ran the boatswain's mates, cutting fiercely with their whips to urge the slaves to the very utmost effort. The vessel gathered speed. The looming headland slipped by. The mouth of the cove appeared to widen as they approached it. Beyond spread the dark steely mirror of the dead-calm sea.

Rosamund could scarcely breathe in the intensity of her suspense. She set a hand upon the arm of Sakr-el-Bahr.

"Shall we elude them, after all?" she asked in a trembling whisper.

"I pray that we may not," he answered, muttering. "But this is the handiwork I feared. Look!" he added sharply, and pointed.

They had shot clear to the headland. They were out of the cove, and suddenly they had a view of the dark bulk of the galleon, studded with a score of points of light, riding a cable's length away on their larboard quarter.

"Faster!" cried the voice of Asad. "Row for your lives, you infidel swine! Lay me your whips upon these hides of theirs! Bend me these dogs to their oars, and they'll never overtake us now."

Whips sang and thudded below them in the waist, to be answered by more than one groan from the tormented panting slaves, who already were spending every ounce of strength in this cruel effort to elude their own chance of salvation and release. Faster beat the tomtom marking the desperate time, and faster in response to it came the creak and dip of oars and the panting, stertorous breathing of the rowers.

"Lay on! Lay on!" cried Asad, inexorable.

"We are drawing away!" cried Marzak in jubilation. "The praise to Allah!"

And so indeed they were. Visibly the lights of the galleon were receding. With every inch of canvas spread yet she appeared to be standing still, so faint was the breeze that stirred. And whilst she crawled, the galeasse raced as never yet she raced since Sakr-el-Bahr had commanded her, for Sakr-el-Bahr had never yet turned tail upon the foe in whatever strength he found him.

Suddenly over the water from the galleon came a loud hail. Asad laughed, and in the darkness shook his fist at them, cursing them in the name of Allah and his Prophet. And then in answer to that curse of his, the galleon's side belched fire; the calm of the night was broken by a roar of thunder, and something smote the water ahead of the Moslem vessel with a resounding thudding splash.

In fear Rosamund drew closer to Sakr-el-Bahr. But Asad laughed again.

"No need to fear their marksmanship," he cried. "They can not see us. Their own lights dazzle them. On! On!"

"He is right," said Sakr-el-Bahr. "But the truth is that they will not fire to sink us because they know you to be aboard."

She looked out to sea again, and beheld those friendly lights falling farther and farther astern.

"We are drawing steadily away," she groaned. "They will never overtake us now."

So feared Sakr-el-Bahr. He more than feared it. He knew that save for some miraculous rising of the wind it must be as she said. And then out of his despair leaped inspiration—a desperate inspiration, true child of that despair of which it was begotten.

"There is a chance," he said to her. "But it is as a throw of the dice with life and death for stakes."

"Then seize it," she bade him instantly. "For though it should go against us we shall not be losers."

"You are prepared for anything?" he asked her.

"Have I not said that I will go down with you this night? Ah, don't waste time in words!"

"Be it so, then," he replied gravely, and moved away a step then checked.

"You had best come with me," he said.

Obediently she complied and followed him, and some there were who stared as these two passed down the gangway, yet none attempted to hinder her movements. Enough and to spare was there already to engage the thoughts of all aboard that vessel.

He thrust a way for her, past the boatswain's mates who stood over the slaves ferociously plying tongues and whips, and so brought her to the waist. Here he took up the lantern which had been muffled, and as its light once more streamed forth, Asad shouted an order for its extinction. But Sakr-el-Bahr took not the least heed of that command. He stepped to the mainmast, about which the powder kegs had been stacked. One of these had been broached against its being needed by the gunners on the poop. The unfastened lid rested loosely atop of it. That lid Sakr-el-Bahr knocked over; then he pulled one of the horn sides out of the lantern, and held the now half-naked flame immediately above the powder.

A cry of alarm went up from some who had watched him. But above that cry rang his sharp command:

"Cease rowing!"

The tomtom fell instantly silent, but the slaves took yet another stroke.

"Cease rowing!" he commanded again.

"Asad!" he called. "Bid them pause, or I'll blow you all straight into the arms of *Shaitan*."

And he lowered the lantern until it rested on the very rim of the powder keg.

At once the rowing ceased. Slaves, corsairs, officers, and Asad himself stood paralyzed, all at gaze upon that grim figure illumined by the lantern, threatening them with doom. It may have crossed the minds of some to throw themselves forthwith upon him; but to arrest them was the dread lest any movement towards him should precipitate the explosion that must blow them all into the next world.

At last Asad addressed him, his voice half-choked with rage.

"May Allah strike thee dead! Art thou *djinn*-possessed?"

Marzak, standing at his father's side, set a quarrel to the bow which he had snatched up.

"Why do you all stand and stare?" he cried. "Cut him down, one of you!"

And even as he spoke he raised his bow. But his father checked him, perceiving what must be the inevitable result.

"If any man takes a step toward me, the lantern goes straight into the gunpowder," said Sakr-el-Bahr serenely. "And if you shoot me as you intend, Marzak, or if any other shoots, the same will happen of itself. Be warned unless you thirst for the Paradise of the Prophet."

"Sakr-el-Bahr!" cried Asad, and from its erstwhile anger his voice had now changed to a note of intercession.

He stretched out his arms appealingly to the captain whose doom he had already pronounced in his heart and mind.

"Sakr-el-Bahr, I conjure thee by the bread and salt we have eaten together, return to thy senses, my son."

"I am in my sense," was the answer, "and being so I have no mind for the fate reserved me in Algiers—by the memory of that same bread and salt. I have no mind to go back with thee to be hanged or sent to toil at an oar again."

"And if I swear to thee that naught of this shall come to pass?"

"Thou'lt be forsworn. I would not trust thee now, Asad. For thou art proven a fool, and in all my life I never found good in a fool and never trusted one—save once, and he betrayed me. Yesterday I pleaded with thee, showing thee the wise course, and affording thee thine opportunity. At a slight sacrifice thou mightest have had me and hanged me at they leisure. 'Twas my own life I offered thee, and for all that thou knewest it, yet thou knewest not that I knew." He laughed.

"See now what manner of fool art thou? Thy greed hath wrought thy ruin. Thy hands were opened to grasp more than they could hold. See now the consequence. It comes yonder in that slowly but surely approaching galleon."

Every word of it sank into the brain of Asad thus tardily to enlighten him. He wrung his hands in his blended fury and despair. The crew stood in appalled silence, daring to make no movement that might precipitate their end.

"Name thine own price," cried the Basha at length, "and I swear to thee by the beard of the Prophet it shall be paid thee."

"I named it yesterday, but it was refused. I offered thee my liberty and my life if that were needed to gain the liberty of another."

Had he looked behind him he might have seen the sudden lighting of Rosamund's eyes, the sudden clutch at her bosom,—which would have announced to him that his utterances were none so cryptic but that she had understood them.

"I will make thee rich and honored, Sakr-el-Bahr," Asad continued urgently. "Thou shalt be as mine own son. The Bashalik itself shall be thine when I lay it down, and all men shall do thee honor in the meanwhile as to myself."

"I am not to be bought, O mighty Asad. I never was. Already wert thou set upon my death. Thou canst command it now, but only upon the condition that thou share the cup with me. What is written is written. We have sunk some tall ships together in our day, Asad. We'll sink together in our turn tonight if that be thy desire."

"May thou burn forevermore in hell, thou black-hearted traitor!" Asad cursed him, his anger bursting all the bonds he had imposed upon it.

AND then, of a sudden, upon that admission of defeat from their Basha there arose a great clamor from the crew. Sakr-el-Bahr's sea-hawks called upon him, reminding him of their fidelity and love, and asking could he repay it now by dooming them all thus to destruction.

"Have faith in me!" he answered them. "I have never led you into aught but victory. Be very sure that I shall not lead you now into defeat—on this the last occasion that we stand together."

"But the galleon is upon us!" cried Vigitello.

And so, indeed, it was; creeping up slowly under that faint breeze, her tall bulk loomed now above them, her prow plowing slowly forward at an acute angle to the prow of the galeasse. Another moment and she was alongside, and with a swing and clank of metal and a yell of victory from the English seamen lining her bulwarks her grappling irons swung down to seize the corsair ship at prow and stern and waist.

Scarce had they fastened, than a torrent of men in breastplates and morions poured over her side, to alight upon the prow of the galeasse, and not even the fear of the lantern held above the powder barrel could now restrain the corsairs from giving these hardy boarders the reception they reserved for all infidels. In an instant the fighting platform on the prow was become a raging, seething hell of battle luridly illumined by the ruddy glow from the lights aboard the *Silver Heron*. Foremost among those who had leaped down had been Lionel and Sir John Killigrew. Foremost among those to receive them had been Jasper Leigh, who had passed his sword through Lionel's body even as Lionel's feet came to rest upon the deck, and before the battle was joined.

A dozen others went down on either side before Sakr-el-Bahr's ringing voice could quell the fighting, before his command to them to hear him was obeyed.

"Hold there!" he had bellowed to his sea-hawks, using the *lingua franca*. "Back, and leave this to me. I will rid you of these foes."

Then in English he had summoned his countrymen also to desist.

"Sir John Killigrew!" he called in a loud voice. "Hold your hand until you have heard me! Call your men back and let none others come aboard! Hold until you have heard me, I say, then wreak your will."

Sir John, perceiving him by the mainmast with Rosamund at his side, and leaping at the almost inevitable conclusion that he meant to threaten her life, perhaps to destroy her if they continued their advance, flung himself before his men, to check them.

Thus almost as suddenly as it had been joined the combat paused.

"What have you to say, you renegade dog?" Sir John demanded.

"This, Sir John: that unless you order your men back aboard your ship, and make oath to desist from this encounter, I'll take you straight down to hell with us at once. I'll heave this lantern into the powder here, and we sink and you come down with us held by your own grappling hooks. Obey me and you shall have all that you have come to seek aboard this vessel. Mistress Rosamund shall be delivered up to you."

Sir John glowered upon him a moment from the poop, considering. Then:

"Though not prepared to make terms with you," he announced, "yet I will accept the conditions you impose, but only provided that I have all indeed that I am come to seek. There is aboard this galley an infamous renegade hound whom I am bound by my knightly oath to take and hang. He, too, must be delivered up to me. His name was Oliver Tressilian."

Instantly, unhesitatingly, came the answer—

"Him, too, will I surrender to you upon your sworn oath that you will then depart and do here no further hurt."

Rosamund caught her breath, and clutched Sakr-el-Bahr's arm, the arm that held the lantern.

"Have a care, mistress," he bade her sharply, "or you will destroy us all."

"Better that!" she answered him.

And then Sir John pledged him his word that upon his own surrender and that of Rosamund he would withdraw nor offer hurt to any there.

Sakr-el-Bahr turned to his waiting corsairs, and briefly told them what terms he had made.

He called upon Asad to pledge his word that these terms would be respected, and no blood shed on his behalf, and Asad answered him, voicing the anger of all against him for his betrayal.

"Since he wants thee that he may hang thee, he may have thee and so spare us the trouble, for 'tis no less than thy treachery deserves from us."

"Thus, then, I surrender," he announced to Sir John, and flung the lantern overboard.

One voice only was raised in his defense, and that voice was Rosamund's. But even that voice failed, conquered by weary nature. This last blow following upon all that lately she had endured bereft her of all strength. Half-swooning she collapsed against Sakr-el-Bahr even as Sir John and a handful of his followers leaped down to deliver her and make fast their prisoner.

The corsairs stood looking on in silence; the loyalty to their great captain, which would have made them spend their last drop of blood in his defense, was quenched by his own act of treachery which had brought the English ship upon them. Yet when they saw him pinioned and hoisted to the deck of the *Silver Heron,* there was a sudden momentary reaction in their ranks. Simitars were waved aloft, and cries of menace burst forth. If he had betrayed them, yet he had so contrived that they should not suffer by that betrayal. And that was worthy the Sakr-el-Bahr they knew and loved; so worthy that their love and loyalty leaped full-armed again upon the instant.

But the voice of Asad called upon them to bear in mind what in their name he had promised, and since the voice of Asad alone might not have sufficed to quell that sudden spark of revolt, there came down to them the voice of Sakr-el-Bahr himself issuing his last command:

"Remember and respect the terms I have made for you! *Mektub!* May Allah guard and prosper you!"

A wail was his reply, and with that wail ringing in his ears to assure him that he did not pass unloved, he was hurried below to prepare him for his end.

The ropes of the grapnels were cut, and slowly the galleon passed away into the night, leaving the galley to replace what slaves had been maimed in the encounter and to head back for Algiers, abandoning the expedition against the argosy of Spain.

Under the awning upon the poop Asad now sat like a man who has awakened from an evil dream. He covered his head and wept for one who had been as a son to him, and whom through his madness he had lost. He cursed all women, and he cursed destiny; but the bitterest curse of all was for himself.

In the pale dawn they flung the dead overboard and washed the decks, nor did they notice that a man was missing in token that the English captain, or else his followers, had not kept strictly to the letter of the bond.

They returned in mourning to Algiers—mourning not for the Spanish argosy which had been allowed to go her ways unmolested, but for the stoutest captain that ever bared his simitar in the service of Islam. The story of how he came to be delivered up was never clearly told; none dared clearly tell it, for none who had participated in the deed but took shame in it thereafter, however clear it might be that Sakr-el-Bahr had brought it all upon himself. But, at least, it was understood that he had not fallen in battle, and hence it was assured that he was still alive. Upon that presumption there was built up a sort of legend that he would one day come back; and redeemed captives returning a half-century later related how in Algiers to that day the coming of Sakr-el Bahr was still confidently expected and looked for by all true Moslems.

CHAPTER XXX

THE HEATHEN CREED

SAKR-EL-BAHR was shut up in a black hole in the forecastle of the *Silver Heron* to await the dawn and to spend the time in making his soul. No words had passed between him and Sir John since his surrender. With wrists pinioned behind him, he had been hoisted aboard the English ship, and in the waist of her he had stood for a moment face to face with Lord Henry Goade. I imagine the florid countenance of the Queen's Lieutenant wearing a preternaturally grave expression, his eyes forbidding as they rested upon the renegade. I know—from Lord Henry's own pen—that no word had passed between them during those brief moments before Sakr-el-Bahr was hurried away by his guards to be flung into those dark, cramped quarters reeking of tar and bilge.

For a long hour he lay where he had fallen, believing himself alone; and time and place would no doubt conduce to philosophical reflection upon his condition. I like to think that he found that when all was considered, he had little with which to reproach himself. If he had done evil he had made ample amends. It can scarcely be pretended that he had betrayed those loyal Moslem followers of his, or, if it is, at least it must be added that he himself had paid the price of that betrayal.

Rosamund was safe, Lionel would meet the justice due to him, and as for himself, being as good as dead already, he was worth little thought. He must have derived some measure of content from the reflection that he was spending his life to the very best advantage. Ruined it had been long since. True, but for his ill-starred expedition of vengeance he might long have continued to wage war as a corsair, might even have risen to the proud Moslem eminence of the Bashalik of Algiers and become a feudatory prince of the Grand Turk. But for one who was born a Christian gentleman that would have been an unworthy way to have ended his days. The present was the better course.

A faint rustle in the impenetrable blackness of his prison turned the current of his thoughts. A rat, he thought, and drew himself to a sitting attitude, and beat his slippered heels upon the ground to drive away the loathly creature. Instead, a voice challenged him out of the gloom.

"Who's there?"

It startled him for a moment, in his complete assurance that he had been alone.

"Who's there?" the voice repeated, querulously to add: "What black hell be this? Where am I?"

And now he recognized the voice for Jasper Leigh's, and marvelled how that latest of his recruits to the ranks of Mohammed should be sharing this prison with him.

"Faith," said he, "you're in the forecastle of the *Silver Heron;* though how you come here is more than I can answer."

"Who are ye?" the voice asked.

"I have been known in Barbary as Sakr-el-Bahr."

"Sir Oliver!"

"I suppose that is what they will call me now. It is as well perhaps that I am to be buried at sea, else it might plague these Christian gentlemen what legend to inscribe upon my headstone. But you—how come you hither? My bargain with Sir John was that none should be molested, and I can not think Sir John would be forsworn."

"As to that I know nothing since I did not even know where I was bestowed until ye informed me. I was knocked senseless in the fight, after I had put my bilbo through your comely brother. That is the sum of my knowledge."

Sir Oliver caught his breath.

"What do you say? You killed Lionel?"

"I believe so," was the cool answer. "At least I sent a couple of feet of steel through him—'twas in the press of the fight when first the English dropped aboard the galley; Master Lionel was in the van—the last place in which I should have looked to see him."

There fell a long silence. At length Sir Oliver spoke in a small voice.

"Not a doubt but you gave him no more than he was seeking. You are right, Master Leigh; the van was the last place in which to look for him, unless he came deliberately to seek steel that he might escape a rope. Best so, no doubt. Best so! God rest him!"

No doubt they took you because of that," Sir Oliver pursued, as if communing with himself. "Being in ignorance perhaps of his deserts, deeming him a saint and martyr, they resolved to avenge him upon you, and dragged you hither for that purpose."

He sighed.

"Well, well, Master Leigh, I make no doubt that knowing yourself for a rascal you have all your life been preparing your neck for a noose; so this will come as no surprize to you."

The skipper stirred uneasily, and groaned.

"Lord, how my head aches!" he complained.

"They've a sure remedy for that," Sir Oliver comforted him. "And you'll swing in better company than you deserve, for I am to be hanged in the morning too. You've earned it as fully as have I, Master Leigh. Yet I am sorry for you—sorry you should suffer where I had not so intended."

Master Leigh sucked in a shuddering breath, and was silent for awhile.

Then he repeated an earlier question.

"Do you believe in God, Sir Oliver?"

"There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his Prophet," was the answer, and from his tone Master Leigh could not be sure that he did not mock.

"That's a heathen creed," said he in fear and loathing.

"Nay, now; it's a creed by which men live. They perform as they preach, which is more than can be said of any Christians I have ever met."

"How can you talk so upon the eve of death?" cried Leigh in protest.

"Faith," said Sir Oliver, "it's considered the season of truth above all others."

"Then ye don't believe in God?"

"On the contrary, I do."

"But not in the real God," the skipper insisted.

"There can be no God but the real God—it matters little what men call Him."

"Then if ye believe, are ye not afraid?"

"Of what?"

"Of hell, damnation, and eternal fire," roared the skipper, voicing his own belated terrors.

"I have but fulfilled the destiny which in His Omniscience He marked out for me," replied Sir Oliver. "My life hath been as he designed it, since naught may exist or happen save by His Will. Shall I then fear damnation for having been as God fashioned me?"

" 'Tis the heathen Moslem creed!" Master Leigh protested.

" 'Tis a comforting one," said Sir Oliver, "and it should comfort such a sinner as thou."

But Master Leigh refused to be comforted. "Oh!" he groaned miserably. "I would that I did not believe in God!"

"Your disbelief could no more abolish Him than can your fear create Him," replied Sir Oliver. "But your mood being what it is, were it not best you prayed?"

"Will not you pray with me?" quoth that rascal in his sudden fear of the hereafter.

"I shall do better," said Sir Oliver at last. "I shall pray for you—to Sir John Killigrew, that your life be spared."

"Sure he'll ever heed you!" said Master Leigh with a catch in his breath.

"He shall. His honor is concerned in it. The terms of my surrender were that none else aboard the galley should suffer any hurt."

"But I killed Master Lionel."

"True—but that was in the scrimmage that preceded my making terms. Sir John pledged me his word, and Sir John will keep to it when I have made it clear to him that honor demands it."

A great burden was lifted from the skipper's mind—that great shadow of the fear of death that had overhung him. With it, it is greatly to be feared that his desperate penitence also departed. At least he talked no more of damnation, nor took any further thought for Sir Oliver's opinions and beliefs concerning the hereafter. He may rightly have supposed that Sir Oliver's creed was Sir Oliver's affair, and that should it happen to be wrong he was scarcely himself a qualified person to correct it. As for himself, the making of his soul could wait until another day, when the necessity for it should be more imminent.

Upon that he lay down and attempted to compose himself to sleep, though the pain in his head proved a difficulty. Finding slumber impossible after a while he would have talked again; but by that time his companion's regular breathing warned him that Sir Oliver had fallen asleep during the silence.

Now this surprized and shocked the skipper. He was utterly at a loss to understand how one who had lived Sir Oliver's life, been a renegade and a heathen, should be able to sleep tranquilly in the knowledge that at dawn he was to hang. Considering matters he was profoundly touched to reflect that in such a season Sir Oliver could have found room in his mind to think of him and his fate and to undertake to contrive that he should be saved from the rope.

He was the more touched when he bethought him of the extent to which he had himself been responsible for all that happened to Sir Oliver.

Out of the consideration of heroism, a certain heroism came to be begotten in him, and he fell to pondering how in his turn he might perhaps serve Sir Oliver by a frank confession of all that he knew of the influences that had gone to make Sir Oliver what he was. This resolve uplifted him, and oddly enough it uplifted him all the more when he reflected that perhaps he would be jeopardizing his own neck by the confession upon which he had determined.

So through that endless night he sat, nursing his aching head and enheartened by the first purpose he had ever conceived of a truly good and altruistic deed. Yet fate it seemed was bent upon frustrating that purpose of his. For when at dawn they came to hale Sir Oliver to his doom, they paid no heed to Jasper Leigh's demands that he, too, should be taken before Sir John.

"Thee bean't included in our orders," said a seaman shortly.

"Maybe not," retorted Master Leigh, "because Sir John little knows what it is in my power to tell him. Take me before him, I say, that he may hear from me the truth of certain matters ere it be too late."

"Be still," the seaman bade him, and struck him heavily across the face, so that he reeled and collapsed into a corner. "Thee turn will come soon. Just now our business be with this other heathen."

"Naught that you can say would avail," Sir Oliver assured him quietly. "But I thank you for the thought that marks you for my friend. My hands are bound, Jasper. Were it otherwise I would beg leave to clasp your own. Fare you well!"

Sir Oliver was led out into the golden sunlight which almost blinded him after his long confinement in that dark hole. They were, he gathered, to conduct him to the cabin where a short mockery of a trial was to be held. But in the waist their progress was arrested by an officer, who bade them wait.

Sir Oliver sat down upon a coil of rope, his guard about him, an object of curious inspection to the rude seamen. They thronged the forecastle and the hatchways to stare at this formidable corsair who once had been a Cornish gentleman and who had become a renegade Moslem and a terror to Christianity.

Truth to tell, the sometime Cornish gentleman was difficult to discern in him as he sat there still wearing the caftan of cloth of silver over his white tunic and a turban of the same material swathed about his steel headpiece that ended in a spike. Idly he swung his brown sinewy legs, naked from knee to ankle, with the inscrutable calm of the fatalist upon his swarthy hawk face with its light agate eyes and black forked beard; and those callous seamen who had assembled there to jeer and mock him were striken silent by the intrepidity and stoicism of his bearing in the face of death.

If the delay chafed him, he gave no outward sign of it. If his hard, light eyes glanced hither and thither it was upon no idle quest. He was seeking Rosamund, hoping for a last sight of her before they launched him upon his last dread voyage.

But Rosamund was not to be seen. She was in the cabin at the time. She had been there for this hour past, and it was to her that the present delay was due.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE JUDGES

IN THE absence of any woman into whose care they might entrust her, Lord Henry, Sir John, and Master Tobias, the ship's surgeon, had amongst them tended Rosamund as best they could when numbed and half-dazed she was brought aboard the *Silver Heron.*

Master Tobias had applied such rude restoratives as he commanded, and having made her as comfortable as possible upon a couch in the spacious cabin astern, he had suggested that she should be allowed the rest of which she appeared so sorely to stand in need. He had ushered out the commander and the Queen's Lieutenant, and himself had gone below to a still more urgent case that was demanding his attention—that of Lionel Tressilian, who had been brought limp and unconscious from the galeasse together with some four other wounded members of the *Silver Heron's* crew.

At dawn Sir John had come below, seeking news of his wounded friend. He found the surgeon kneeling over Lionel. As he entered, Master Tobias turned aside, rinsed his hands in a metal basin placed upon the floor, and rose wiping them on a napkin.

"I can do no more, Sir John," he muttered in a despondent voice. "He is sped."

"Dead, d'ye mean?" cried Sir John, a catch in his voice.

The surgeon tossed aside the napkin, and slowly drew down the upturned sleeves of his black doublet.

"All but dead," he answered. "The wonder is that any spark of life should still linger in a body with that hole in it. He is bleeding inwardly, and his pulse is steadily weakening. It must continue so until imperceptibly he passes away. You may count him dead already, Sir John." He paused.

"A merciful, painless end," he added, and sighed perfunctorily, his pale shaven face decently grave, for all that such scenes as these were commonplaces in his life.

"Of the other four," he continued, "Blair is dead; the other three should all recover."

But Sir John gave little heed to the matter of those others. His grief and dismay at this quenching of all hope for his friend precluded any other consideration at the moment.

"And he will not even recover consciousness?" he asked insisting, although already he had been answered.

"As I have said, you may count him dead already, Sir John. My skill can do nothing for him."

Sir John's head drooped, his countenance drawn and grave.

"Nor can my justice," he added gloomily. "Though it avenge him, it can not give me back my friend."

He looked at the surgeon.

"Vengeance, sir, is the hollowest of all the mockeries that go to make up life."

"Your task, Sir John," replied the surgeon, "is one of justice not vengeance."

"A quibble, when all is said."

He stepped to Lionel's side, and looked down at the pale handsome face over which the dark shadows of death were already creeping.

"If he would but speak in the interests of this justice that is to do! If we might but have the evidence of his own words, lest I should ever be asked to justify the hanging of Oliver Tressilian."

"Surely, sir," the surgeon ventured, "there can be no such question ever. Mistress Rosamund's word alone should suffice, if indeed so much as that even were required."

"Aye! His offenses against God and man are too notorious to leave grounds upon which any should ever question my right to deal with him out of hand."

There was a tap at the door and Sir John's own body-servant entered with the announcement that Mistress Rosamund was asking urgently to see him.

"She will be impatient for news of him," Sir John concluded, and he groaned. "My God! How am I to tell her? To crush her in the very hour of her deliverance with such news as this! Was ever irony so cruel?"

He turned, and stepped heavily to the door. There he paused.

"You will remain by him to the end?" he bade the surgeon interrogatively.

Master Tobias bowed.

"Of course, Sir John." And he added, " 'Twill not be long."

Sir John looked across at Lionel again—a glance of valediction.

"God rest him!" he said hoarsely, and passed out.

In the waist he paused a moment, turned to a knot of lounging seamen, and bade them throw a halter over the yard-arm, and hale the renegade Oliver Tressilian from his prison. Then with slow heavy step and heavier heart he went up the companion to the vessel's castellated poop.

The sun, new risen in a faint golden haze, shone over a sea faintly rippled by the fresh clean winds of dawn to which their every stitch of canvas was now spread. Away on the larboard quarter, a faint cloudy outline, was the coast of Spain.

SIR JOHN'S long sallow face was preternaturally grave when he entered the cabin, where Rosamund awaited him. He bowed to her with a grave courtesy, doffing his hat and casting it upon a chair. The last five years had brought some strands of white into his thick black hair, and at the temples in particular it showed very gray, giving him an appearance of age to which the deep lines in his brow contributed.

He advanced towards her, as she rose to receive him.

"Rosamund, my dear!" he said gently, and took both her hands. He looked with eyes of sorrow and concern into her white, agitated face. "Are you sufficiently rested, child?"

"Rested?" she echoed on a note of wonder that he should suppose it.

"Poor lamb, poor lamb!" he murmured, as a mother might have done, and drew her towards him, stroking that gleaming auburn head.

"We'll speed us back to England with every stitch of canvas spread. Take heart then, and——"

But she broke in impetuously, drawing away from him as she spoke, and his heart sank with foreboding of the thing she was about to inquire.

"I overheard a sailor just now saying to another that it is your intent to hang Sir Oliver Tressilian out of hand—this morning."

He misunderstood her utterly.

"Be comforted," he said. "My justice shall be swift; my vengeance sure. The yardarm is charged already with the rope on which he shall leap to his eternal punishment."

She caught her breath, and set a hand upon her bosom as if to repress its sudden tumult.

"And upon what grounds," she asked him with an air of challenge, squarely facing him, "do you intend to do this thing?"

"Upon what grounds?" he faltered.

He stared and frowned, bewildered by her question and its tone.

"Upon what grounds?" he repeated, foolishly almost in the intensity of his amazement.

Then he considered her more closely, and the wildness of her eyes bore to him slowly an explanation of words that at first had seemed beyond explaining.

"I see!" he said in a voice of infinite pity; for the conviction to which he had leaped was that her poor wits were all astray after the horrors through which she had lately travelled.

"You must rest," he said gently, "and give no thought to such matters as these. Leave them to me, and be very sure that I shall avenge you as is due."

"Sir John, you mistake me, I think. I do not desire that you avenge me. I have asked you upon what grounds you intend to do this thing, and you have not answered me."

In increasing amazement he continued to stare. He had been wrong, then. She was quite sane and mistress of her wits. And yet instead of the fond inquiries concerning Lionel which he had been dreading came this amazing questioning of his grounds to hang his prisoner.

"Need I state to you—of all living folk—the offenses which that dastard has committed?" he asked, expressing thus the very question that he was setting himself.

"You need to tell me," she answered, "by what right you constitute yourself his judge and executioner; by what right you send him to his death in this peremptory fashion, without trial."

Her manner was as stern as if she were invested with all the authority of a judge.

"But you," he faltered in his ever-growing bewilderment, "you, Rosamund, against whom he has offended so grievously, surely you should be the last to ask me such a question! Why, it is my intention to proceed with him as is the manner of the sea with all knaves taken as Oliver Tressilian was taken. If your mood be merciful towards him—which, as God lives, I can scarce conceive—consider that this is the greatest mercy he can look for."

"You speak of mercy and vengeance in a breath, Sir John." She was growing calm, her agitation was quieting and a grim sternness was replacing it.

He made a gesture of impatience.

"What good purpose could it serve to take him to England?" he demanded. "There he must stand his trial, and the issue is foregone. It were unnecessary to torture him."

"The issue may be none so foregone as you suppose," she replied. "And that trial is his right."

Sir John took a turn in the cabin, his wits all confused. It was preposterous that he should stand and argue upon such a matter with Rosamund of all people, and yet she was compelling him to it against his every inclination, against common sense itself.

"If he so urges it, we'll not deny him," he said at last, deeming it best to humor her. "We'll take him back to England if he demands it, and let him stand his trial there. But Oliver Tressilian must realize too well what is in store for him to make any such demand."

He paused before her, and held out his hands in entreaty.

"Come, Rosamund, my dear! You are distraught, you——"

"I am indeed distraught, Sir John," she answered, and took the hands that he extended.

"Oh, have pity!" she cried with a sudden change to utter intercession. "I implore you to have pity!"

"What pity can I show you, child? You have but to name——"

" 'Tis not pity for me, but pity for him that I am beseeching of you."

"For him?" he cried, frowning again.

"For Oliver Tressilian."

He dropped her hands and stood away.

"God's light!" he swore. "You sue for pity for Oliver Tressilian, for that renegade, that incarnate devil? Oh, you are mad!" he stormed. "Mad!" and he flung away from her, whirling his arms.

"I love him," she said simply.

That answer smote him instantly still. Under the shock of it he just stood and stared at her again, his jaw fallen.

"You love him!" He said at last below his breath. "You love him! You love a man who is a pirate, a renegade, the abductor of yourself and of Lionel, the man who murdered your brother!"

"He did not." She was fierce in her denial of it. "I have learnt the truth of that matter."

"From his lips, I suppose?" said Sir John, and he was unable to repress a sneer. "And you believed him?"

"Had I not believed him I should not have married him."

"Married him?"

Sudden horror came now to temper his bewilderment. Was there to be no end to these astounding revelations? Had they reached the climax yet, he wondered, or was there still more to come?

"You married that infamous villain?" he asked, and his voice was expressionless.

"I did—in Algiers on the night we landed there."

He stood gaping at her whilst a man might count to a dozen, and then abruptly he exploded.

"It is enough!" he roared, shaking a clenched fist at the low ceiling of the cabin. "It is enough, as God's my witness. If there were no other reason to hang him, that would be reason and to spare. You may look to me to make an end of this infamous marriage within the hour."

"Ah, if you will but listen to me!" she pleaded.

"Listen to you?"

He paused by the door to which he had stepped in his fury, intent upon giving the word that there and then should make an end, and summoning Oliver Tressilian before him, announce his fate to him and see it executed on the spot.

"Listen to you?" he repeated, scorn and anger blending in his voice. "I have heard more than enough already!"

There were a score of questions a man of perspicuity would now have asked, not one of which appears to have occurred to the knight of Arwenack. If anything arrested him upon the cabin's threshold, delayed him in the execution of the thing he had resolved upon, no doubt it was sheer curiosity as to what further extravagances Rosamund might yet have it in her mind to utter.

"This man has suffered," she told him, and was not put off by the hard laugh with which he mocked that statement. "God alone knows what he has suffered in body and in soul for sins which he never committed. Much of that suffering came to him through me. I know today that he did not murder Peter. I know that but for a disloyal act of mine he would be in a position incontestably to prove it without the aid of any man. I know that he was carried off, kidnaped before ever he could clear himself of the accusation, and that as a consequence no life remained him but the life of a renegade which he chose. Mine was the chief fault. And I must make amends. Spare him to me! If you love me——"

But he had heard enough. His sallow face was flushed to a flaming purple.

"Not another word!" he blazed at her. "It is because I do love you—love and pity you from my heart—that I will not listen. It seems I must save you not only from that knave, but from yourself. I were false to my duty by you, false to your dead father and murdered brother else. Anon, you shall thank me, Rosamund."

And again he turned to depart.

"Thank you?" she cried in a ringing voice. "I shall curse you. All my life I shall loathe and hate you, holding you in horror for a murderer if you do this thing. You fool! Can you not see! You fool!"

He recoiled. Being a man of position and importance, quick, fearless, and vindictive of temperament—and also, it would seem, extremely fortunate—it had never happened to him in all his life to be so uncompromisingly and frankly judged. She was by no means the first to account him a fool, but she was certainly the first to call him one to his face; and whilst to the general it might have proved her extreme sanity, to him it was no more than the culminating proof of her mental distemper.

"Pish!" he said between anger and pity. "You are mad, stark mad! Your mind's unhinged, your vision's all distorted. This fiend incarnate is become a poor victim of the evil of others; and I am become a murderer in your sight—a murderer and a fool. God's Life! Bah! Anon when you are rested, when you are restored, I pray that things may once again assume their proper aspect."

He turned, all aquiver still with indignation, and was barely in time to avoid being struck by the door which opened suddenly from without.

Lord Henry Goade, dressed entirely in black, and with his gold chain of office—an ominous sign could they have read it—upon his broad chest, stood in the doorway, silhouetted sharply against the flood of morning sunlight at his back. His benign face extremely grave to match the suit he had put on, but its expression lightened somewhat when his glance fell upon Rosamund standing there by the table's edge.

"I am overjoyed," he said, "to find you so far recovered, and seeming so much yourself again."

"She were better abed," snapped Sir John, two hectic spots burning still in his sallow cheeks. "She is distempered, quite."

"Sir John is mistaken, my lord," was her calm assurance. "I am very far from suffering as he conceives."

"I rejoice therein, my dear," said his lordship

"It happens," he added somberly, "that we may require your testimony in this grave matter that is toward." He turned to Sir John; "I have bidden them bring up the prisoner for sentence. Is the ordeal too much for you, Rosamund?"

"Indeed, no, my lord," she replied readily; "I welcome it." And threw back her head as one who braces herself for a trial of endurance.

"No, no," cut in Sir John, protesting fiercely. "Do not heed her, Harry. She——"

"Considering," she interrupted, "that the chief count against the prisoner must concern his—his dealings with myself, surely the matter is one upon which I should be heard."

"Surely, indeed," Lord Henry agreed, a little bewildered, "always provided you are certain it will not overtax your endurance and distress you overmuch. We could perhaps dispense with your testimony."

"In that, my lord, I assure you that you are mistaken," she answered. "You cannot dispense with it."

"Be it so, then," said Sir John grimly, and he strode back to the table, prepared to take his place there.

Lord Henry's twinkling blue eyes were still considering Rosamund somewhat searchingly, his fingers tugging thoughtfully at his short tuft of ashen-colored beard. Then he turned to the door.

"Come in, gentlemen," he said, "and bid them bring up the prisoner."

Steps clanked upon the deck, and three of Sir John's officers made their appearance to complete the court that was to sit in judgment upon the renegade corsair, a judgment whose issue was foregone.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE ADVOCATE

CHAIRS were set at the long brown table of massive oak, and the officers sat down facing the open door and the blaze of sunshine on the poop-deck, their backs to the other door and the horn windows which opened upon the stern-gallery. The middle place was assumed by Lord Henry Goade by virtue of his office of Queen's Lieutenant, and the reason for his chain of office became now apparent. He was to preside over this summary court. On his right sat Sir John Killigrew, and beyond him an officer named Youldon. The other two whose names have not survived, occupied his lordship's left.

A chair had been set for Rosamund at the table's extreme right and across the head of it, so as to detach her from the judicial bench. She sat there now, her elbows on the polished board, her face resting in her half-clenched hands, her eyes scrutinizing the five gentlemen who formed this court.

Steps rang on the companion, and a shadow fell athwart the sunlight beyond the open door. From the vessel's waist came a murmur of voices and a laugh. Then Sir Oliver appeared in the doorway guarded by two fighting seamen in corselet and morion with drawn swords.

He paused an instant in the doorway, and his eyelids flickered as if he had received a shock when his glance alighted upon Rosamund. Then under the suasion of his guards he entered, and stood forward, his wrists still pinioned behind him, slightly in advance of the two soldiers.

He nodded perfunctorily to the court, his face entirely calm.

"A fine morning, sirs?" said he.

The five considered him in silence, but Lord Henry's glance as it rested upon the corsair's Moslem garb was eloquent of the scorn which filled his heart.

"You are no doubt aware, sir," said Sir John after a long pause, "of the purpose for which you have been brought hither."

"Scarcely," said the prisoner. "But I have no doubt whatever of the purpose for which I shall presently be taken hence.

"However," he continued, cool and critical, "I can guess from your judicial attitudes the superfluous mockery that you intend. If it will afford you entertainment, faith I do not grudge indulging you. I would observe only that it might be considerate in you to spare Mistress Rosamund the pain and weariness of the business that is before you."

"Mistress Rosamund herself desired to be present," said Sir John scowling.

"Perhaps," said Sir Oliver, "she does not realize——"

"I have made it abundantly plain to her," Sir John interrupted, almost vindictively.

The prisoner looked at her as if in surprize, his brows knit. Then with a shrug he turned to his judges again.

"In that case," said he, "there's no more to be said. But before you proceed, there is another matter upon which I desire an understanding.

"The terms of my surrender were that all others should be permitted to go free. You will remember, Sir John, that you pledged me your knightly word for that. Yet I find aboard here one who was lately with me upon my galeasse —a sometime English seaman, named Jasper Leigh, whom you hold a prisoner."

"He killed Master Lionel Tressilian," said Sir John coldly.

"That may be, Sir John. But the blow was delivered before I made my terms with you, and you can not violate these terms without hurt to your honor."

"D'ye talk of honor, sir?" said Lord Henry.

"Of Sir John's honor, my lord," said the prisoner, with mock humility.

"You are here, sir, to take your trial," Sir John reminded him.

"So I had supposed. It is a privilege for which you agreed to pay a certain price, and now it seems you have been guilty of filching something back. It seems so, I say. For I can not think but that the arrest was inadvertently effected, and that it will suffice that I draw your attention to the matter of Master Leigh's detention."

Sir John considered the table. It was beyond question that he was in honor bound to enlarge Master Leigh, whatever the fellow might have done; and, indeed, his arrest had been made without Sir John's knowledge until after the event.

"What am I to do with him?" he growled sullenly.

"That is for yourself to decide, Sir John. But I can tell you what you may not do with him. You may not keep him a prisoner, or carry him to England or injure him in any way. Since his arrest was a pure error, as I gather, you must repair that error as best you can. I am satisfied that you will do so, and need say no more. Your servant, sirs," he added to intimate that he was now entirely at their disposal, and he stood waiting.

There was a slight pause, and then Lord Henry, his face inscrutable, his glance hostile and cold, addressed the prisoner.

"We have had you brought hither to afford you an opportunity of urging any reasons why we should not hang you out of hand, as is our right."

Sir Oliver looked at him in almost amused surprize.

"Faith!" he said at length. "It was never my habit to waste breath."

"I doubt you do not rightly apprehend me, sir," returned his lordship, and his voice was soft and silken as became his judicial position. "Should you demand a formal trial, we will convey you to England that you may have it."

"But lest you should build unduly upon that," cut in Sir John fiercely, "let me warn you that as the offenses for which you are to suffer were chiefly committed within Lord Henry Goade's own jurisdiction, your trial will take place in Cornwall, where Lord Henry has the honor to be Her Majesty's Lieutenant and dispenser of justice."

"Her Majesty is to be congratulated," said Sir Oliver elaborately.

"It is for you to choose, sir," Sir John ran on, "whether you will be hanged on sea or land."

"My only possible objection would be to being hanged in the air. But you're not likely to heed that," was the flippant answer.

Lord Henry leaned forward again.

"Let me beg you, sir, in your own interests to be serious," he admonished the prisoner.

"I confess the occasion, my lord. For if you are to sit in judgment upon my piracy, I could not desire a more experienced judge of the matter on sea or land than Sir John Killigrew."

"I am glad to deserve your approval," Sir John replied tartly. "Piracy," he added, "is but the least of the counts against you."

Sir Oliver's brows went up, and he stared at the row of solemn faces.

"As God's my life, then, your other counts must needs be sound—or else, if there be any justice in your methods, you are like to be disappointed of your hopes of seeing me swing. Proceed, sirs, to the other counts. I vow you become more interesting than I could have hoped."

"Can you deny the piracy?" quoth Lord Henry.

"Deny it? No. But I deny your jurisdiction in the matter, or that of any English court, since I have committed no piracy in English waters."

Lord Henry admits that the answer silenced and bewildered him, being utterly unexpected. Yet what the prisoner urged was a truth so obvious that it was difficult to apprehend how his lordship had come to overlook it. But Sir John, less perspicuous or less scrupulous in the matter, had his retort ready.

"Did you not come to Arwenack and forcibly carry off thence——"

"Nay, now, nay now," the corsair interrupted, good-humoredly. "Go back to school, Sir John, to learn that abduction is not piracy."

"Call it abduction, if you will," Sir John admitted.

"Not if I will, Sir John. We'll call it what it is, if you please."

"You are trifling, sir. But we shall mend that presently," and Sir John banged the table with his fist, his face flushing slightly in anger.

"You can not pretend to be ignorant," Sir John continued, "that abduction is punishable by death under the law of England."

He turned to his fellow-judges.

"We will then, sirs, with your concurrence, say no more of the piracy."

"Faith," said Lord Henry in his gentle tones, "in justice we can not." And he shrugged the matter aside.

"The prisoner is right in what he claims. We have no jurisdiction in that matter, seeing that he committed no piracy in English waters, nor—so far as our knowledge goes—against any vessel sailing under the English flag."

Rosamund stirred. Slowly she took her elbows from the table, and folded her arms resting them upon the edge of it. Thus leaning forward she listened now with an odd brightness in her eye, a slight flush in her cheeks reflecting some odd excitment called into life by Lord Henry's admission—an admission which sensibly whittled down the charges against the prisoner.

Sir Oliver, watching her almost furtively noted this and marveled, even as he marvelled at her general composure. It was in vain that he sought to guess what might be her attitude of mind towards himself now that she was safe again among friends and protectors.

But Sir John, intent only upon the business ahead, plunged angrily on.

"Be it so," he admitted impatiently. "We will deal with him upon the counts of abduction and murder. Have you anything to say?"

"Nothing that would be like to weigh with you," replied Sir Oliver. And then with a sudden change from his slightly derisive manner to one that was charged with passion:

"Let us make an end of this comedy," he cried; "of this pretense of judicial proceedings. Hang me, and have done, or set me to walk the plank. Play the pirate, for that is a trade you understand. But a' God's name don't disgrace the queen's commission by playing the judge."

Sir John leaped to his feet, his face aflame.

"Now, by Heaven, you insolent knave——"

But Lord Henry checked him, placing a restraining hand upon his sleeve, and forcing him gently back into his seat. Himself he now addressed the prisoner.

"Sir, your words are unworthy one who, whatever his crimes, has earned the repute of being a sturdy, valiant fighter. Your deeds are so notorious—particularly that which caused you to flee from England and take to roving and that of your reappearance at Arwenack and the abduction of which you were then guilty—that your sentence in an English court is a matter foregone beyond all possible doubt. Nevertheless, it shall be yours, as I have said, for the asking.

"Yet," he added, and his voice was lowered and very earnest, "were I your friend, Sir Oliver, I would advise you that you rather choose to be dealt with in the summary fashion of the sea."

"Sirs," replied Sir Oliver, "your right to hang me I have not disputed, nor do I. I have no more to say."

"But I have."

Thus Rosamund at last, startling the court with her crisp, sharp utterance. All turned to look at her as she rose, and stood tall and compelling at the table's end.

"Rosamund!" cried Sir John, and rose in his turn. "Let me implore you——"

She waved him peremptorily, almost contemptuously, into silence.

"Since in this matter of the abduction with which Sir Oliver is charged," she said, "I am the person said to have been abducted, it were perhaps well that before going further in this matter you should hear what I may hereafter have to say in an English court."

Sir John shrugged, and sat down again. She would have her way, he realized; just as he knew that its only result could be to waste their time and protract the agony of the doomed man.

Lord Henry turned to her, his manner full of deference.

"Since the prisoner has not denied the charge, and since wisely he refrains from demanding to be taken to trial, we need not harass you, Mistress Rosamund. Nor will you be called upon to say anything in an English court."

"There you are at fault, my lord," she answered, her voice very level. "I shall be called upon to say something when I impeach you all for murder upon the high seas, as impeach you I shall if you persist in your intent."

"Rosamund!" cried Oliver in his sudden amazement—and it was a cry of joy and exultation.

She looked at him, and smiled—a smile full of courage and friendliness and something more, a smile for which he considered that his impending hanging was but a little price to pay. Then she turned again to that court, into which her words had flung a sudden consternation.

"Since he disdains to deny the accusation, I must deny it for him," she informed them. "He did not abduct me, sirs, as is alleged. I love Oliver Tressilian. I am of full age and mistress of my actions, and I went willingly with him to Algiers where I became his wife."

Had she flung a bomb amongst them she could hardly have made a greater disorder of their wits. They sat back, and stared at her with blank faces, muttering incoherencies.

"His—his wife?" babbled Lord Henry. "You became his——"

And then Sir John cut in fiercely:

"A lie! A lie to save that foul villain's neck!"

Rosamund leaned towards him, and her smile was almost a sneer.

"Your wits were ever sluggish, Sir John," she said. "Else you would not need reminding that I could have no object in lying to save him if he had done me the wrong that is imputed to him."

Then she looked at the others.

"I think, sirs, that in this matter my word will outweigh Sir John's or any man's in any court of justice."

"Faith, that's true enough!" ejaculated the bewildered Lord Henry. "A moment, Killigrew!"

And again he stilled the impetuous Sir John. He looked at Sir Oliver, who in truth was very far from being the least bewildered in that company.

"What do you say to that, sir?" he asked.

"To that?" echoed the almost speechless corsair.

"What is there left to say?" he evaded.

" 'Tis all false," cried Sir John again. "We were witnesses of the event—you and I, Harry—and we saw——"

"You saw," Rosamund interrupted. "But you did not know what had been concerted."

For a moment that silenced them again. They were as men who stand upon crumbling ground, whose every effort to win to a safer footing but occasions a fresh slide of soil. Then Sir John sneered, and made his *riposte.*

"No doubt she will be prepared to swear that her betrothed, Master Lionel Tressilian, accompanied her willingly upon that elopement."

"No," she answered. "As for Lionel Tressilian he was carried off that he might expiate his sins—sins which he had fathered upon his brother there, sins which are the subject of your other count against him."

"Now what can you mean by that?" asked his lordship.

"That the story that Sir Oliver killed my brother is a calumny; that the murderer was Lionel Tressilian, who, to avoid detection and to complete his work, caused Sir Oliver to be kidnaped that he might be sold into slavery."

"This is too much!" roared Sir John. "She is trifling with us, she makes white black and black white. She has been bewitched by that crafty rogue, by Moorish arts that——"

"Wait!" said Lord Henry, raising his hand. "Give me leave."

He confronted her very seriously.

"This—this is a grave statement, mistress. Have you any proof—anything that you conceive to be a proof—of what you are saying?"

But Sir John was not to be repressed.

" 'Tis but the lying tale this villain told her. He has bewitched her, I say. 'Tis plain as the sunlight yonder."

Sir Oliver laughed outright at that. His mood was growing exultant, buoyant, and joyous, and this was the first expression of it.

"Bewitched her? You're determined never to lack for a charge. First 'twas piracy, then abduction and murder, and now 'tis witchcraft!"

"Oh, a moment, pray!" cried Lord Henry. "Do you seriously tell us, Mistress Rosamund, that it was Lionel Tressilian who murdered Peter Godolphin?"

"Seriously?" she echoed, and her lips were twisted in a little smile of scorn. "I not merely tell it you, I swear it here in the sight of God. It was Lionel who murdered my brother and it was Lionel who put it about that the deed was Sir Oliver's. It was said that Sir Oliver had run away from the consequences of something discovered against him, and I to my shame believed the public voice. But I have since discovered the truth——"

"The truth, do you say, mistress?" cried the impetuous Sir John in a voice of passionate contempt. "The truth——"

Again his Lordship was forced to intervene.

"Have patience, man," he admonished the knight. "The truth will prevail in the end, never fear, Killigrew."

"Meanwhile we are wasting time," grumbled Sir John, and on that fell moodily silent.

"Are we further to understand you to say, mistress," Lord Henry resumed, "that the prisoner's disappearance from Penarrow was due not to flight, as was supposed, but to his having been trepanned by order of his brother?"

"That is the truth as I stand here in the sight of Heaven," she replied in a voice that rang with sincerity and carried conviction to more than one of the officers seated at that table.

"By that act the murderer sought not only to save himself from exposure, but to complete his work by succeeding to the Tressilian estates. Sir Oliver was to have been sold into slavery to the Moors of Barbary. Instead the vessel upon which he sailed was captured by Spaniards, and he was sent to the galleys by the Inquisition. When his galley was captured by Moslem corsairs he took the only way of escape that offered. He became a corsair and a leader of corsairs, and then——"

"What else he did we know," Lord Henry interrupted. "And I assure you it would all weigh very lightly with us or with any court if what else you say is true."

"It is true. I swear it, my lord," she repeated.

"Aye," he answered, nodding gravely. "But can you prove it?"

"What better proof can I offer you than that I love him, and have married him?"

"Bah!" said Sir John.

"That, mistress," said Lord Henry, his manner extremely gentle, "is proof that yourself you believe this amazing story. But it is not proof that the story itself is true. You had it, I suppose," he continued smoothly, "from Oliver Tressilian himself?"

"That is so; but in Lionel's own presence, and Lionel himself confirmed it—admitting its truth."

"You dare say that?" cried Sir John, and stared at her in incredulous anger. "My God! You dare say that?"

"I dare and do," she answered him, giving him back look for look.

Lord Henry sat back in his chair, and tugged gently at his ashen tuft of beard, his florid face overcast and thoughtful. There was something here he did not understand at all.

"Mistress Rosamund," he said quietly, "let me exhort you to consider the gravity of your words. You are virtually accusing one who is no longer able to defend himself; if your story is established, infamy will rest for ever upon the memory of Lionel Tressilian. Let me ask you again, and let me entreat you to answer scrupulously: Did Lionel Tressilian admit the truth of this thing which you say that the prisoner charged him?"

"Once more I solemnly swear that what I have spoken is true; that Lionel Tressilian did in my presence, when charged by Sir Oliver with the murder of my brother and the kidnaping of himself, admit those charges. Can I make it any plainer, sirs?"

Lord Henry spread his hands.

"After that, Killigrew, I do not think we can go further in this matter. Sir Oliver must go with us to England, and there take his trial."

But there was one present—that officer named Youldon—whose wits, it seems, were of keener temper.

"By your leave, my lord," he now interposed, and he turned to question the witness. "What was the occasion on which Sir Oliver forced this admission from his brother?"

Truthfully she answered—

"At his house in Algiers on the night he——"

She checked suddenly, perceiving then the trap that had been set for her. And the others perceived it also. Sir John leapt into the breach which Youldon had so shrewdly made in her defences.

"Continue, pray," he bade her. "On the night he——?"

"On the night we arrived there," she answered desperately, the color now receding slowly from her face.

"And that of course," said Sir John slowly mockingly almost, "was the first occasion on which you heard this explanation of Sir Oliver's conduct?"

"It was," she faltered—perforce.

"So that," insisted Sir John, determined to leave her no loophole whatsoever, "so that until that night you had naturally continued to believe Sir Oliver to be the murderer of your brother?"

She hung her head in silence, realizing that the truth could not prevail here since she had hampered it with a falsehood, which was now being dragged into the light.

"Answer me!" Sir John commanded.

"There is no need to answer," said Lord Henry slowly, in a voice of pain, his eyes lowered to the table. "There can, of course, be but one answer. Mistress Rosamund has told us that he did not abduct her forcibly; that she went with him of her own free will and married him; and she has urged that circumstance as a proof of her conviction of his innocence. Yet now it becomes plain that at the time she left England with him she still believed him to be her brother's slayer. Yet she asks us to believe that he did not abduct her."

He spread his hands again and pursed his lips in a sort of grieved contempt.

"Let us make an end, a' God's name?" said Sir John, rising.

"Ah, wait!" she cried. "I swear that all I have told you is true—all but the matter of the abduction. I admit that, but I condoned it in view of what I have since learnt."

"She admits it!" mocked Sir John.

But she went on without heeding him. "Knowing what he has suffered through the evil of others, I gladly own him my husband, hoping to make some amends to him for the part I had in his wrongs. You must believe me, sirs. But if you will not, I ask you is his action of yesterday to count for naught? Are you not to remember that but for him you would have had no knowledge of my whereabouts?"

They stared at her in fresh surprize.

"To what do you refer now, mistress? What action of his is responsible for this?"

"Do you need to ask? Are you so set on murdering him that you affect ignorance? Surely you know that it was he dispatched Lionel to inform you of my whereabouts?"

Lord Henry tells us that at this he smote the table with his open palm, displaying an anger he could no longer curb.

"This is too much!" he cried. "Hitherto I have believed you sincere, but misguided and mistaken. But so deliberate a falsehood transcends all bounds. What has come to you, girl? Why, Lionel himself told us the circumstances of his escape from the galeasse. Himself he told us how that villain had him flogged and then flung him into the sea for dead."

"Ah!" said Sir Oliver between his teeth. "I recognize Lionel there! He would be false to the end, of course. I should have thought of that."

Rosamund at bay, in a burst of regal anger leaned forward to face Lord Henry and the others.

"He lied, the base, treacherous dog!" she cried.

"Madam," Sir John rebuked her, "you are speaking of one who is all but dead."

"And more than damned," added Sir Oliver.

"Sirs," he cried, "you prove naught but your own stupidity when you accuse this gentle lady of falsehood."

"We have heard enough, sir," Lord Henry interrupted.

"Have you so, by ——!" he roared, stung suddenly to anger. "You shall hear yet a little more. The truth will prevail, you have said yourself; and prevail the truth shall since this sweet lady so desires it."

He was flushed, and his light eyes played over them like points of steel, and like points of steel they carried a certain measure of compulsion. He had stood before them half-mocking and indifferent, resigned to hang and desiring the thing might be over and ended as speedily as possible. But all that was before he suspected that life could still have anything to offer him, whilst he conceived that Rosamund was definitely lost to him.

True he had the memory of a certain tenderness she had shown him yesternight aboard the galleys but he had deemed that tenderness to be no more than such as the situation itself begot. Almost he had deemed the same to be here the case until he had witnessed her fierceness and despair in fighting for his life, until he had heard and gaged the sincerity of her avowal that she loved him and desired to make some amends to him for all that he had suffered in the past. That had spurred him, and had a further spur been needed, it was afforded him when they branded her words with falsehood, mocked her to her face with what they supposed to be her lies. Anger had taken him at that to stiffen his resolve to make a stand against them and use the one weapon that remained him—that a merciful chance, a just God had placed within his power almost despite himself.

"I little knew, sirs," he said, "that Sir John was guided by the hand of destiny itself when last night, in violation of the terms of my surrender, he took a prisoner from my galeasse. That man is, as I have said, a sometime English seaman, named Jasper Leigh. He fell into my hands some months ago, and took the same road to escape from thraldom that I took myself under the like circumstances. I was merciful in that I permitted him to do so, for he is the very skipper who was suborned by Lionel to kidnap me and carry me into Barbary. With me he fell into the hands of the Spaniards. Have him brought hither, and question him."

In silence they all looked at him, but on more than one face he saw the reflection of amazement at his impudence, as they conceived it.

It was Lord Henry who spoke at last:

"Surely, sir, this is most oddly, most suspiciously apt," he said, and there could be no doubt that he was faintly sneering. "The very man to be here aboard, and taken prisoner thus, almost by chance——"

"Not quite by chance, though very nearly. He conceives that he has a grudge against Lionel, for it was through Lionel that misfortune overtook him. Last night when Lionel so rashly leapt aboard the galley, Jasper Leigh saw his opportunity to settle an old score and took it. It was as a consequence of that that he was arrested."

"Even so, the chance is still miraculous."

"Miracles, my lord, must happen sometimes if the truth is to prevail," Sir Oliver replied with a tinge of his earlier mockery. "Fetch him hither, and question him. He knows naught of what has passed here. It were a madness to suppose him primed for a situation which none could have foreseen. Fetch him hither, then."

Steps sounded outside, but went unheeded at the moment.

"Surely," said Sir John, "we have been trifled with by liars long enough!"

The door was flung open, and the lean black figure of the surgeon made its appearance.

"Sir John!" he called urgently, breaking without ceremony into the proceedings, and never heeding Lord Henry's scowl. "Master Tressilian has recovered consciousness. He is asking for you and for his brother. Quick, sirs! He is sinking fast."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE JUDGMENT

TO THAT cabin below the whole company repaired in all speed in the surgeon's wake, Sir Oliver coming last between his guards. They assembled about the couch where Lionel lay, leaden-hued of face, his breathing labored, his eyes dull and glazing.

Sir John ran to him, went down upon one knee to put loving arms about that chilling clay, and very gently raised him in them, and held him so resting against his breast.

"Lionel!" he cried in stricken accents.

And then as if thoughts of vengeance were to soothe and comfort his sinking friend's last moments, he added—

"We have the villain fast."

Very slowly and with obvious effort Lionel turned his head to the right, and his dull eyes went beyond Sir John and made quest in the ranks of those that stood about him.

"Oliver?" he said in a hoarse whisper. "Where is Oliver?"

"There is not the need to distress you—" Sir John was beginning, when Lionel interrupted him.

"Wait!" he commanded in a louder tone. "Is Oliver safe?"

"I am here," said Sir Oliver's deep voice, and those who stood between him and his brother, drew aside that they might cease from screening him.

Lionel looked at him for a long moment in silence, sitting up a little. Then he sank back again slowly against Sir John's breast.

"God has been merciful to me a sinner," he said, "since He accords me the means to make amends, tardily though it be."

Then he struggled up again, and held out his arms to Sir Oliver, and his voice came in a great pleading cry:

"Noll! My brother! Forgive!"

Oliver advanced, none hindering until, with his hands still pinioned behind him he stood towering there above his brother, so tall that his turban brushed the low ceiling of the cabin. His countenance was stern and grim.

"What is it that you ask me to forgive?" he asked.

Lionel struggled to answer, and sank back again into Sir John's arms, fighting for breath; there was a trace of blood-stained foam about his lips.

"Speak! Oh, speak, in God's name!" Rosamund exhorted him from the other side, and her voice was wrung with agony.

He looked at her, and smiled faintly.

"Never fear," he whispered, "I shall speak. God has spared me to that end. Take your arms from me, Killigrew. I am the—the vilest of men. It—it was I who killed Peter Godolphin."

"My God!" groaned Sir John, whilst Lord Henry drew a sharp breath of dismay and realization.

"Ah, but that is not my sin," Lionel continued. "There was no sin in that. We fought, and in self-defense I slew him—fighting fair. My sin came afterwards. When suspicion fell on Oliver, I nourished it—Oliver knew that the deed was mine, and kept silent that he might screen me. I feared the truth might become known for all that—and—and I was jealous of him, and—and I had him kidnaped to be sold——"

His fading voice trailed away into silence. A cough shook him, and the faint crimson foam on his lips was increased. But he rallied again, and lay there panting, his fingers plucking at the coverlet.

"Tell, them," said Rosamund, who in her desperate fight for Sir Oliver's life kept her mind cool and steady and directed towards essentials, "tell them the name of the man you hired to kidnap him."

"Jasper Leigh, the skipper of the *Swallow*," he answered, whereupon she flashed upon Lord Henry a look that contained a gleam of triumph for all that her face was ashen and her lips trembled.

Then she turned again to the dying man, relentlessly almost in her determination to extract all vital truth from him ere he fell silent.

"Tell them," she bade him, "under what circumstances Sir Oliver sent you last night to the *Silver Heron*."

"Nay, there is no need to harass him," Lord Henry interposed. "He has said enough already. May God forgive us our blindness, Killigrew!"

Sir John bowed his head in silence over Lionel.

"Is it you, Sir John?" whispered the dying man. "What? Still there? Ha!" he seemed to laugh faintly, then checked. "I am going—" he muttered, and again his voice grew stronger, obeying the last flicker of his shrinking will.

"Noll! I am dying! I—I have made reparation—all that I could. Give me—give me thy hand!"

Gropingly he put forth his right.

"I should have given it you ere this but that my wrists are bound," cried Oliver in a sudden frenzy.

And then exerting that colossal strength of his, he suddenly snapped the cords that pinioned him as if they had been thread. He caught his brother's extended hand, and dropped upon his knees beside him.

"Lionel, boy!" he cried.

It was as if all that had befallen in the last five years had been wiped out of existence. His fierce relentless hatred of his half-brother, his burning sense of wrong, his parching thirst of vengeance, became on the instant all dead, buried, and forgotten. More, it was as if they had never been. Lionel in that moment was again the weak, comely, beloved brother whom he had cherished and screened and guarded, and for whom when the hour arrived he had sacrificed his good name, and the woman he loved, and placed his life itself in jeopardy.

"Lionel, boy!" was all that for a moment he could say.

Then:

"Poor lad! Poor lad!" he added. "Temptation was too strong for thee."

And reaching forth he took the other white hand that lay beyond the couch, and so held both tight-clasped within his own.

From one of the ports a ray of sunshine was creeping upwards towards the dying man's face. But the radiance that now overspread it was from an inward source. Feebly he returned the clasp of his brother's hands.

"Oliver, Oliver!" he whispered. "There is none like thee! I ever knew thee as noble as I was base. Have I said enough to make you safe? Say that he will be safe now," he appealed to the others, "that no——"

"He will be safe," said Lord Henry stoutly. "My word on't."

"It is well. The past is past. The future is in your hands, Oliver. God's blessing on't."

He seemed to collapse, to rally yet again. He smiled pensively, his mind already wandering.

"That was a long swim last night—the longest I ever swam. From Penarrow to Trefusis—a fine long swim. But you were with me, Noll. Had my strength given out—I could have depended on you. I am still chill from it, for it was cold—cold—ugh!"

He shuddered, and lay still.

Gently Sir John lowered him to his couch. Beyond it Rosamund fell upon her knees and covered her face, whilst by Sir John's side Oliver continued to kneel, clasping in his own his brother's chilling hands.

There ensued a long spell of silence. Then with a heavy sigh Sir Oliver folded Lionel's hands across his breast, and slowly, heavily rose to his feet.

The others seemed to take this for a signal. It was as if they had but waited mute and still out of deference to Oliver. Lord Henry moved softly round to Rosamund and touched her lightly upon the shoulder. She rose and went out in the wake of the others, Lord Henry following her, and none remaining but the surgeon.

Outside in the sunshine they checked. Sir John stood with bent head and hunched shoulders, his eyes upon the white deck. Timidly almost—a thing never seen before in this bold man—he looked at Sir Oliver.

"He was my friend," he said sorrowfully, and as if to excuse and explain himself, "and—and I was misled through love of him."

"He was my brother," replied Sir Oliver solemnly. "God rest him!"

Sir John, resolved, drew himself up into an attitude preparatory to receiving with dignity a rebuff should it be administered him.

"Can you find it in your generosity, sir, to forgive me?" he asked, and his air was almost one of challenge.

Silently Sir Oliver held out his hand. Sir John fell upon it almost in eagerness.

"We are like to be neighbors again," he said, "and I give you my word I shall strive to be a more neighborly one than in the past."

"Then, sirs," said Sir Oliver, looking from Sir John to Lord Henry, "I am to understand that I am no longer a prisoner."

"You need not hesitate to return with us to England, Sir Oliver," replied his lordship. "The queen shall hear your story, and we have Jasper Leigh to confirm it if need be, and I will go warranty for your complete reinstatement. Count me your friend, Sir Oliver, I beg."

And he, too, held out his hand. Then turning to the others—

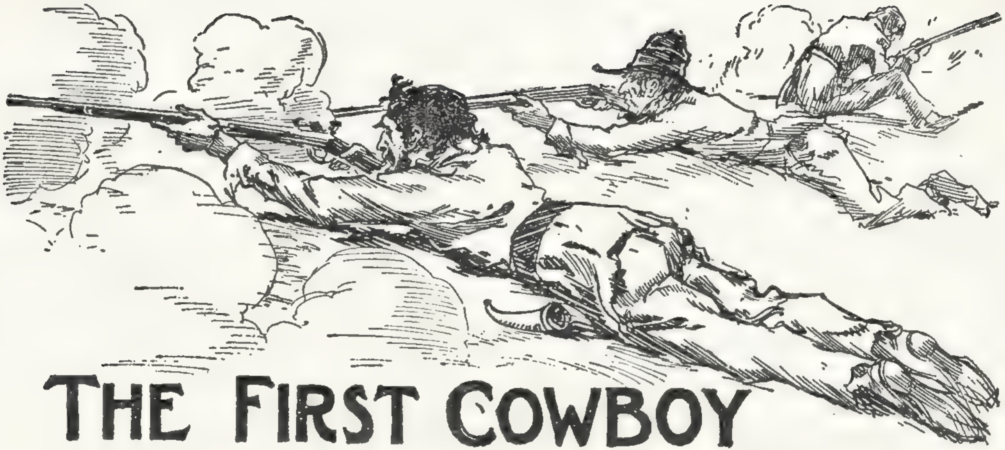
"Come, sirs," he said, "we have duties elsewhere, I think."

They tramped away, leaving Oliver and Rosamund alone. The twain looked long each at the other. There was so much to say, so much to ask, so much to explain, that neither knew with what words to begin. Then Rosamund suddenly came up to him holding out her hands.

"Oh, my dear!" she said, and that, after all, summed up a deal.

One or two over-inquisitive seamen, lounging on the forecastle and peeping through the shrouds, were disgusted to see the lady of Godolphin Court in the arms of a beturbaned bare-legged follower of Mohammed.

THE END



THE FIRST COWBOY

by Frederick Bechdolt

Author of "Red Blood and White," "Adobe Walls," etc.

IN THE days when Texas was a nation, when farmer boys along the Trinity and Brazos were carrying rifles to their evening chores for fear of lurking Indians and the men of the Southwestern settlements were constantly under arms against invading Mexicans, a number of young fellows drifted down into the country between the lower Nueces and the Rio Grande. The most of them had lost their fathers at the Alamo and in the massacre of Fannin's men at Goliad. They came hither to seek adventure and to make their livings, two projects which were at that time compatible.

The land was wild; great grass-grown pampas intersected by wide river bottoms where dense thickets of mesquite and catsclaw grew. Here in former years there had been enormous ranches, but the Mexican owners had migrated beyond the Rio Grande with the unsettled conditions of the Texan revolution; the Indians had burned their homes; nothing remained of that pastoral civilization save a few crumbling adobe walls and the bands of cattle which had lapsed to wildness like the land. These roved the prairies and browsed in the timber, shy as the antelope which wandered in the hills; lean-bodied, swift as mustangs.

The youths hunted them down. They knew nothing of the riata's uses; such few of them as had seen the rawhide ropes scorned them as they scorned everything Mexican. But all of them were expert horsemen. They made their expeditions during the periods of the full moon. By day and night they chased the wild longhorns across the open plateaus and through the timbered bottoms, relaying their ponies when they got the chance, outwearing fear-maddened herds until, through sheer exhaustion, the brutes became half tractable. Then they corralled them in stout pens and drove them eastward to the markets.

They dressed in smoke-tanned buckskin; for in this land where there were neither women nor looms a man must get his raiment as he got his meat, with his long-barreled rifle. A few wore boots but most of them were shod in moccasins. They were among the first in Texas to use the slouching wide-rimmed hat which afterward became universal throughout the cattle country. Some of them had built cabins and dugouts near the streams, but they seldom saw their habitations; save when the snow was on the ground they spent their days and nights in the open.

It was a period of Indian raids, and Santa Anna's troops were constantly crossing the Rio Grande to make brief forays against the isolated border towns. Scarcely a month went by which did not witness the galloping of horsemen who brought to ranch and village and budding frontier metropolis the call to arms. Every district had its ranger company, commanded by some local veteran, whose members were ready to seize their rifles and sling on their long powder

"The First Cowboy," copyright, 1922, by Frederick R. Bechdolt.

horns at a moment's notice. The young fellows from the Nueces were well known among the other bands for their iron endurance in the saddle, their faultless marksmanship, the boldness of their fighting.

So it came that they were named by those with whom they rode, pursuing Indians or Mexicans. And the term by which men called them stuck to them through the years. It fell to them quite naturally because of their vocation. They were known as "the cowboys."

It was the first time that the word was used west of the Mississippi and always thereafter it retained its peculiar significance; it was handed down by these riders of the latter thirties to the booted herders who succeeded them and so it spread over all the West.

Cameron's cowboys was the way that most men put it. For as his men stood out among the Texans, the leader whom they had chosen stood out among them.

Ewen Cameron. They say that he was handsome in a fine, rugged way. He stood straight as an arrow and he weighed more than two hundred pounds. Six feet two in his moccasins, dark-haired, with clear gray eyes and heavy brows; you may picture him in his slouching broad-rimmed hat, his buckskin shirt and breeches worn from long riding; his powder horn slung by his side and in his belt the bowie-knife which was as invariable in those days as the forty-five single-action revolver was later on.

He came from the Highlands of Scotland and there was a burr in his speech. But what may help you best to see him is the love his men had for him. He had led them so boldly against both Mexicans and Indians that, as they were wont to put it, they would have followed him into the depths of hell.

In 1839, spurred on by the example of the Texans, a considerable proportion of the people in northern Chihuahua formed a government of their own and rebelled against the dictator, Santa Anna. They named their new-born state the Republic of the Rio Grande, and Licenciate Canales, a suave and polished lawyer, was given command of their troops. Some three hundred Texans crossed the river and joined the movement, among them Ewen Cameron and his Cowboys.

There was good fighting and plenty of it. In time the armies of Santa Anna triumphed. The men from Texas went back to their homes. The leaders of the unsuccessful movement made their peace with the dictator. Which has its significance in this story because, during those days of stress and battle, Canales and Ewen Cameron had quarreled bitterly.

The lawyer never forgot it. Time passed. He grew strong in the good graces of Santa Anna. And with the rancor which smoldered in his heart begins the glorious last chapter of the Scotchman's life.

On the afternoon of Sunday, September 25th, 1842, Ewen Cameron stood among one thousand Texans before the ruins of the Alamo. The call to arms had brought them here to resist a Mexican incursion; farmer boys from the Trinity, the Colorado and the Brazos; high officials from the capital at Austin; border rangers from the southwestern counties; lawyers, ministers, school teachers and gamblers from a dozen towns. They wore no uniforms.

Long marches, battles and the hardships of living tentless in the open had left the most of them ragged and weatherstained until it would be hard to tell the settler whose home was a dugout from the statesman who was famous for his oratory. Now, while they were waiting for the event which had brought them together in this spot after weeks of campaigning, a private clapped his captain on the back and called him by his first name; a major paused before a group of his men to beg a chew of tobacco from a tow-haired farm lad.

But this spirit of democracy which was perhaps stronger among the Texans than it has been in any other nation before or since, could not erase certain fundamental distinctions; and as they moved among the throng there was that in the leaders which proclaimed their standing as unmistakably as shoulder bars. So, if you had been there, you could have picked out Captain John C. Hays, the famous ranger who had led a score of forays against hostile Indians; old Matthew Caldwell, scout and plainsman just back from months in a Mexican prison after last year's ill-fated expedition to Santa Fé; Thomas J. Green, the fiery South Carolinan, graduate of West Point and a brigadier general in the War for Texan Independence, and Colonel William Fisher who had served with distinction at San Jacinto.

Among them all there was none who got more man-to-man respect from his followers than Ewen Cameron; none who looked more like a leader than the tall Scotchman in his smoke-tanned buckskin.

Of the throng that filled the space before the Alamo's shattered walls, his forty cowboys were a distinctive element. Although they had been campaigning out here on the western frontier ever since the previous April, they looked fresher and more fit than the companies which had marched into the town less than a week ago. And of all they were the most impatient for the beginning of this day's business.

The yellow September sunlight was slanting across the square when a man appeared in a gap which had been a chapel window. At once the murmur of voices died away. For a moment he stood there, enframed by the shattered walls, and looked down upon the crowd in silence. His form was lean; gray threads were beginning to show in his lank dark hair; his face was slender and his eyes were piercing black. It was Edward Burleson, Vice President of the Republic of Texas, who had led his regiment to capture Santa Anna's cannon at the battle of San Jacinto. By their votes these fighting men had made him their commander within the past week. He was about to outline a plan of campaign.

His head went back. He began speaking. He was reminding them of what had taken place that Summer.

San Antonio lay on the uttermost frontier, sixty miles from the nearest town, with one hundred and eighty miles of wilderness between it and the Rio Grande. In April, fourteen hundred of Santa Anna's troops had swooped down upon the place, to retreat across the border when the first ranger companies came hither against them. Within the last month they had returned to take a dozen of the most prominent citizens prisoners. Three hundred Texans had hurried here and fought them to a standstill just outside the town.

The speaker paused; then his voice rang as he went on to describe the fate of Captain Dawson's company of fifty who had found themselves surrounded by odds of ten to one during the battle and had surrendered—to be massacred as soon as they laid down their arms. Then the invaders had fled across the Rio Grande.

These things had taken place. They would, he said, take place again; the towns of western Texas would never be safe from such invasions—until the men of Texas put a stop to it. They could do that; and now the time was come. Let them go to their homes and recruit fresh horses; then in a month return—and he himself would lead them across the Rio Grande where they would put such fear in the hearts of the Mexicans as would keep them within their own borders.

Burleson ceased speaking and a thousand voices roared applause. He had promised them the thing they wanted. And the next morning the companies began departing from San Antonio to prepare for the coming expedition.

The weeks went by. All through Texas men talked of the projected invasion; recruits flocked to the towns; the ranger companies were gathering at San Antonio. But all the time a power greater than opposing armies was at work against them.

The dickerings of nations, which for the sake of euphemism we still call diplomacy, were as potent in those days as they are now. Texas was bankrupt. Only a European loan or annexation to the United States could save her from disintegration. England, on whose friendship a loan depended, was secretly anxious that Mexico retake the country north of the Rio Grande. And our administration at Washington demanded that the young republic remain at peace with Santa Anna. Every skirmish helped to jeopardize the hopes for annexation.

President Sam Houston knew these things. He knew also the temper of his people. Disruption would follow his refusal to sanction the expedition. So he acted, and when the companies had gathered in San Antonio they found that Burleson had been virtually forced out of the command. By proclamation of the Chief Executive, General Alexander Somerville was to lead the expedition.

IT WAS on the morning of November 22nd that they marched out from San Antonio on the old Laredo road. There were more than seven hundred men in line. Two hundred pack animals and three hundred head of cattle followed the column toward the Rio Grande. Ewen Cameron and his cowboys, who had been chafing at the multitude of recent delays, ceased fretting on that Indian Summer morning, for they knew that there were not enough troops in all of northern Mexico to stop them.

The fine weather lasted less than a week. The rains came. General Somerville moved his little army in a manner that was beyond the understanding of men or officers. For nearly three months he marched and countermarched them through boggy river bottoms and over the wild prairies. When Mexican troops were reported in one direction he took another. They used up their meat; their clothing was in tatters. The howling northers cut them to the bone. There was no fighting, and it seemed as if they would never reach the Rio Grande.

Several companies became disgusted and departed for their homes. At last Ewen Cameron got a number of the officers together and they made so formidable a protest that the commander reluctantly moved the troops to the boundary. But on the fourteenth day of December, when they had been dallying for a week or so along the river's banks, Somerville astonished them all by ordering that they disperse to their homes.

Two hundred of them went back. There remained three hundred. Five days after the departure of their companions they elected William Fisher as their commander and prepared to invade Mexico.

When one remembers that only four years before one hundred and twelve Texans under Captain S. W. Jordan had defeated two thousand Mexican troops at Saltillo and had retreated all the way to the Rio Grande with a total loss of five men, the project does not seem so mad. The whole world boasted no better marksmen than these six tattered companies who were encamped on their country's border on the nineteenth of December, 1842; their long-barreled muzzle-loading rifles were the deadliest small arms in modern warfare; there were those among their number who had killed more than a score of Mexicans apiece. Moreover, they belonged to a breed which never did like to turn back.

So they went on. Fisher, their colonel, had fought in this section during the brief-lived Republic of the Rio Grande. Thomas A. Murray was his adjutant. Colonel Thomas J. Green, the West Pointer, was put in command of a flatboat flotilla. The captains of the companies were Ewen Cameron, William M. Eastland, J. G. W. Pierson, William N. Ryan, Claudius Buster and C. K. Reese. They moved down-stream, took the town of Mier without opposition and levied on its people for food and clothing.

On the afternoon of Christmas day while they were waiting for the arrival of these promised supplies on their own side of the Rio Grande, they learned that twenty-four hundred Mexican troops had entered the village. The officers went into council and unanimously decided to attack the enemy.

Mier lies on the right bank of the Alcantra river, seven miles or so from the point where it empties into the Rio Grande. The town has not changed much with the years; you may still see the same flat-topped adobe buildings whose thick gray-brown walls gave shelter to the men of Texas on that December day of 1842; the same narrow streets which literally ran red with the blood of Santa Anna's soldiers. But through the idiosyncrasies of American historians the glory of that day has been wellnigh forgotten. The name of Mier means nothing when men hear it spoken now.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when the officers arrived at their decision. They left forty-two men to guard their camp, crossed the Rio Grande and marched up the Alcantra. At seven in the evening they halted on the summit of a high bluff just across the river from the town. It was black dark; a drizzling rain was falling.

Mexican outposts held the opposite bank; a quarter of a mile or so beyond, the lights of the first houses glowed faintly through the dampness. Colonel Green took a dozen riflemen down a narrow path which wound along the bluff's sheer side to the river, and while these held the attention of the pickets, the others felt their way along the trail. They reached the bank, stole up-stream to the ford and crossed without discovery.

In the confusion of the advance Joseph Berry had fallen over the bluff and broken his leg. So nine men were detailed to remain with him. In the events which were to follow this little party had its own large share.

If one believed in such things he would surely be justified in saying that Fate was busy arranging matters right from the beginning. General Ampudia and General Canales shared the joint command of the Mexicans. In the days of the Republic of the Rio Grande Ampudia and Colonel

Fisher had become firm friends. It has been told how Canales hated Ewen Cameron.

That was the situation at midnight when the Texans lined up on the river bank in the darkness and started toward the town. It was so black that a man could barely see his hand before his face. When they had gone a hundred yards or so a dense mass seemed to emerge from the night before them and a voice called—

"*Quien vive?*"

Three of the captains answered at the same time and with the same sharp order—

"Fire!"

A hundred rifle flashes cut the darkness. Then they heard the Mexican colonel who was in command of the outpost calling on his men to charge. There had been fifty of those men. Now there were not a dozen left to obey him.

A few moments later the Texans reached the outskirts of the town. According to old custom the enemy should be occupying the plaza. So they felt their way between the adobe buildings toward the square and as they were crossing one of the narrow streets at the end of a block, there came a great flash off their left; the night was shaken with the roar of a fieldpiece. They knew where the plaza was now.

They halted as they were, half of them on one side of the street and half on the other. Colonel Green took a dozen riflemen into the roadway. They fired, and before the artillery company had reloaded they fell back into the shelter of the buildings. The cannon's flare made the night red again. The Texans leaped into the street and let go another volley. They kept this up for something like a half hour. In the mean time their companions were entering the houses on both sides of the thoroughfare.

Low structures, some of limestone and some of adobe, they lined the street to the plaza's edge. The captains sent their best marksmen to the windows and rooftops. They put the others to work at battering down the intervening walls. Thus they went slowly on from one room to another; and as the riflemen established themselves in each new stronghold, the pioneers attacked the next barrier.

The fieldpiece bellowed in the plaza. The lean and sunburned marksmen lay along the roofs lining their sights when its flashes gave them light, aiming by guesswork in the intervening periods of darkness. Swarthy foot-soldiers swarmed to the building tops beyond the open square, and the rattle of musketry grew into a long roll. The rifles answered slowly; and when dawn began to creep up over the skyline, leaking down upon the landscape, the Texans saw the bodies drooping over the low parapets and damming the shallow gutters by the roadway.

The morning dragged on. They gained the last buildings fronting the plaza. While the men in the close rooms sweated at their picks and crowbars to open loopholes, the fieldpiece battered the thick walls from without. The riflemen leaped to each growing aperture. And now the heaps of corpses grew fast about the cannon. Some time toward noon sixteen Mexicans made a last rush to serve the piece, and when the little spurts of smoke cleared away from window and parapet fifteen of them lay dead. The artillery was silenced for good now.

Noon passed. There came a lull in the fighting. A bugle sounded in a side street; the riflemen atop the buildings heard the beat of hoofs, the tramp of feet. The Mexicans were gathering for a charge.

In the last rooms on both sides of the roadway the dust rose thick, shrouding the forms of the sharpshooters by the loopholes. Here one was busy cleaning his rifle; another doled the black-grained powder from the long horn, then tamped the wadding down upon it with his ramrod. Grime stained their faces, and the sulfurous smell of old volleys was heavy on the air. A wounded man was moaning in a corner.

A shout came from the roofs. An officer hurried forth to learn what new development had come, and dallied on the parapet, held by the spectacle which had provoked the cheering. Less than half a mile away, across the river on the bluff top which they had occupied the night before, a stirring drama was being enacted.

The nine men, who had been left with Joseph Berry at the beginning of the advance, had taken shelter in a little stone building. Ten Mexican cavalrymen forded the stream on reconnaisance and approached the place. The Texans opened fire. Two of the troopers remained alive when the smoke had cleared away. They fled back to the town.

Now three hundred horsemen and a fieldpiece crossed the Alcantra, and while the artillery was taking a roundabout course toward the summit of the bluff the cavalry deployed. They began closing in on the stone building. The Texans waited until the circle had grown narrow. Then they came forth, nine men against three hundred, and charged straight upon the advancing line. They fired as they drew near; then broke full speed for the gap which their bullets had made for them. Four of them fell dead. Berry was slain in the bed where he was lying helpless. Two survived to reach their companions in the adobe buildings by the plaza. And three were taken prisoners.

The men who were watching the struggle from the housetops never dreamed of the part which one of those captives was unwittingly to play against them within the hour.

Now the bugles sounded again in the hidden streets. Eight hundred Mexicans swept around a corner and as they advanced into the plaza, divided into two charging columns. So it fell that Ewen Cameron and Colonel Fisher found themselves on opposite sides of the street, each in command of his own detachment, repelling separate attacks.

Cameron took his cowboys from the building which they had been holding into a yard beside the plaza. A low wall of loose rocks enclosed the place. They dropped on their knees behind it.

Four hundred of Ampudia's picked infantry advanced toward them at the double quick. Half way across the plaza they slackened their pace; a curtain of smoke unrolled before the front ranks; musket balls spattered against the wall and snarled above the heads of the kneeling Texans. The crash of the volley died away; the smoke cloud cleared. They saw a thick mass of blue and red whose front bristled with leveled bayonets sweeping upon them.

"Now, boys," said Ewen Cameron, "we will go at it."

They fired at will. Gaps showed in the advancing lines. They wavered briefly; then the gaps closed and the mass swept on.

"To the stones, boys," Cameron shouted.

They tore the loose rocks from the wall and met the charge with such a rain of missiles that the hundreds broke and fled before it. That evening, when there was time for noting such things, men counted a dozen who lay with their brains dashed out from the deadly rain. The cowboys were reloading when the rout began. But the column did not rally.

Meantime another force attacked the building on the opposite side of the roadway, and Colonel Fisher took twenty picked men who hurled themselves upon the Mexicans in a countercharge so savage that the enemy turned and fled.

It was mid-afternoon now. A second lull came in the fighting. The Texans had lost ten killed and twenty-three wounded. The Mexican casualties numbered eight hundred. The cannon was silenced. But Colonel Fisher was lying in his headquarters, racked with nausea. A musket ball had severed his thumb at the joint and torn a nerve. Body and mind and will were limp from agony.

Just at this time the cavalrymen who had made the sortie across the river brought their prisoners before General Ampudia. Dr. Sinnockson, the surgeon of the expedition, was one of the trio. He knew nothing of the battle's progress or where the advantage lay.

"You will take a white flag," General Ampudia instructed him, "and go to Colonel Fisher. Tell him that his old friend Ampudia sends him this message: 'You are outnumbered ten to one, and seventeen hundred fresh troops are on their way to me. These reenforcements are already close to the town. If you fight on, you and all your men will surely be killed. If you surrender I will grant you all proper treatment as prisoners of war. I will give you five minutes for decision.' "

That was the purport of the message. Dr. Sinnockson found Colonel Fisher in the throes of nausea. The other officers were called into conference, and while they stood there astonished at the demand, the sick man raised himself with a great effort.

"I think," he said, "it is our only hope."

Then Ewen Cameron cried out that he would die first and Thomas Green turned around to face the soldiers who stood close by.

"If a hundred of you will go with me, I'll take you back across the Rio Grande," he shouted.

Fisher was on his feet now.

"Let the men be brought to attention," he ordered.

And when this had been done he asked them for a vote.

But there was no vote. There was nothing but a great confusion, a medley of upraised voices, oaths of astonishment, shouts of anger.

Then several of the overwearied threw down their rifles. There was, they said, no use in going on. Two or three started off toward the Mexican lines. Cameron's cowboys yelled in derision.

"Go," one called after them, "and rot in chains. You belong there."

But Fisher had already sent back word that he would sign a capitulation. And so by the chain of strange coincidence, in the moment of their victory, these men of Texas became prisoners.

That night Licenciate Canales came to the town church where they lay under guard and saw his old enemy Ewen Cameron among them. The next day the lawyer-general set forth for the City of Mexico to bring the news to Santa Anna. That was his official mission, but he had a private errand of his own with the dictator.

Five days later the prisoners started on the long march to the City of Mexico. General Ampudia and his staff went on ahead with Colonel Fisher, Thomas J. Green, Murray the adjutant and two or three privates who were to act as servants for the captive officers. Colonel Barragon and two hundred and fifty soldiers followed with the rest. The six captains remained with their companies. So it came about that Ewen Cameron was henceforth the leader of the Texans.

Ewen Cameron was leader. None chose him; there was no word spoken of captains or command. For a long time there was no talk of plans. Fifteen to twenty miles a day, they marched along the highway between the lofty arid mountains. At every town their guards conducted them, as the ancient armies used to lead their captives, in triumphal procession through the streets all hung with banners; and some in the crowds spat upon them as they passed. At night they slept in thick-walled *cuartels* or in the cattle corrals at the outskirts of the dreary villages.

The swarthy soldiers who watched them marveled at their songs and laughter. Always it was the cowboys of the Nueces who sang loudest. They danced in couples on the earthen floors of musty jails. They dropped on all fours in the stock pens, with lowered heads, and played that they were bulls. They pawed the earth and bellowed challenges; they fought mock battles while the others roared with mirth. They were the first to whisper the word that was in every man's mind now—

"Escape."

At first a word; the time came when it was a definite project. The cowboys were its foremost advocates; and Ewen Cameron was the man who planned its details.

The days dragged on, one weary march after another, and every night time saw them farther from the Rio Grande. He waited for a favorable opportunity. They reached Monterey, where ten of their countrymen who had been taken prisoners in other border forays were added to their number. On February tenth they came to the Hacienda Salado, one hundred miles beyond Saltillo. And here, when Cameron had talked with the five other captains, he gave out word that the next morning they should rush the guards.

THE Hacienda Salado lay in the depths of a narrow valley. On either side steep mountain walls rose to the sky. Only the Spanish bayonet and cactus grew on those peaks; their flanks were earthless. A savage sun had stripped them bare. They were the skeletons of mountains. Under their enclosing sides the hamlet of flat-topped adobes was almost indiscernible, a few scattered specks lost to the eye in the enormous confusion of arid granite.

As the cold twilight of dawn seeped down from the sky's whitening rim, revealing the enfolded ridges, wiping away the shadows in which the cliffs lurked, to crawl at last along the valley's floor, there came the beat of hoofs, the tramp of infantry. Somewhere a horse neighed; a bugle call climbed from the depths, growing fainter as it mounted from rock to rock. The guards were gathering for the day's march.

The building where the Texans were confined was the only one of any size in the place. A tall stone wall enclosed an outer courtyard in whose center the prison stood. A company of foot-soldiers came down the narrow road and halted before the wall's main gate; a troop of cavalry drew up beside them, dismounted and stood at ease among the horses.

Within the courtyard one hundred and fifty infantrymen were smoking their after-breakfast cigarettes, awaiting the order to form at attention. Their muskets were stacked; the cartridge boxes hung in clusters from the bayoneted muzzles. Two sentries were pacing back and forth across the outer gateway; two others stood within the building's open door with loaded muskets at their shoulders.

Inside the long earthen-floored room the Texans awaited their great moment; two hundred and fourteen ragged men, unarmed, gaunt from underfeeding, foot-sore from weeks of marching. Ewen Cameron was to give the signal by throwing his hat in the air. Then they would attack two hundred and fifty soldiers with their bare hands.

As cattle stirring on the holding ground they moved about. They talked in low tones; now and again one laughed or clapped his fellow on the back in passing. The light crept through the barred windows, and as it grew within the room Cameron began to approach the doorway. Samuel H. Walker was lounging near the threshold smoking a cigaret. He was to rush one sentry while the Scotchman fell upon the other.

Now Cameron stopped to speak a word to one of his cowboys, who grinned with the marvelous serenity of youth, making some careless answer. Now he came on as one indifferent to where he strays. He paused again to chat with a fellow captain. He took a few steps toward the threshold. Then he halted and glanced around at his followers.

"Well, boys," he said coolly, "we will go at it."

And with that he flung his hat to the ceiling.

He sprang upon the nearest sentry, and Walker made his leap in the same instant. They were big men, these two; the clipping thud of their great fists came distinct and sharp into the silence; the soldiers went down before them like a pair of pole-axed oxen. And now the leaders bounded back from the senseless forms, brandishing the captured muskets. The whole roomful surged after them through the doorway.

They poured into the courtyard where the companies of infantry were lounging in the pallid sunrays. Some in those swarthy groups glanced about at the noise of footfalls and ran to the stacked muskets. They seized the first pieces that their hands fell upon and turned to face the rush. The sentries at the outer gate fired into the mass; and then the place was filled with an eddying confusion of swiftly moving forms; a score of hand-to-hand fights were raging at once.

A tall farmer boy from the Bexar country had got hold of a bayonet and was stabbing desperately at an infantryman who was sweeping about him with his clubbed gun. Young Captain Barragon, son of the guard's commander, was standing with his back to the wall waving a broken sword in defiance at a group of cowboys who had surrounded him and were demanding his surrender. His soldiers were already beginning to scatter. The roar of voices swelled, then died, and the sound of blows on bare flesh succeeded it. The most of the Mexicans were in full flight now. Four or five bodies lay before the gateway.

Ewen Cameron broke through the group who were closing in on the beardless captain.

"I surrender only to an officer," the boy was shouting.

"I am an officer," Cameron answered and took the broken sword.

He turned to his men.

"To the gate, boys."

They followed him and were in the forefront of the rush.

The soldiers in the street had formed, the cavalry afoot beside the infantry. Their muskets flamed. Dr. R. F. Brenham and Patrick Lyons fell before the volley. The others swept on. Some of them bore captured guns and some were fighting with brickbats. They charged with the desperation of men who had rather die than not, and the troopers fled before them, abandoning their horses. The infantry fell back around a corner. Captain Fitzgerald called for volunteers. Fifty fell in behind him and rushed the companies as they were reforming. A spattering of shots sounded as they turned the corner. Fitzgerald fell dead. The rest hurled themselves upon the close-formed ranks and scattered them.

It was all over now. Two hundred and fourteen unarmed men had defeated two hundred and fifty who were equipped for battle. The Mexican officers surrendered formally. The Texans gathered up all the horses and muskets in the village. By ten o'clock they all were in the saddle—all save the wounded, whose proper care had been made the main condition of the capitulation. The Rio Grande lay four hundred miles away. After what they had done that distance seemed a little thing.

There were one hundred and ninety-three of them when they started northward that morning. They rode for fifty miles and halted at midnight long enough to water their horses. Then they swung into the saddles and went twelve miles farther. Here they slept for two hours while the wearied animals got a bite to eat.

The sun was rising when they resumed their journey. Now and again that day they passed a ranch or hacienda. Soldiers were guarding all of these places. Toward evening they saw a few small squads of cavalry in their rear. But the troopers hung back beyond rifle shot, for all the world like bands of coyotes that follow a herd of sheep, awaiting a favorable opportunity to make a dash on some lagging animal when the shepherd is looking elsewhere.

The road wound through steep-walled defiles, mounting the flanks of the enclosing peaks to pass from one cañon to the next. The country all about was waterless, a nest of savage mountains whose sides radiated heat waves under a blazing sun.

ON THE morning of February 12th, they left the highway to avoid Saltillo and struck off into the untracked mountains. For twenty-four hours they climbed among the granite ridges. During that time they did not see a drop of water. They found no food. Huge buzzards sailed overhead, keeping pace with their slow advance, biding their time. On the dawn of the thirteenth they struck the road again. Two hours later they found a little spring. There was a sup for every man, and every horse was allowed a single swallow.

That day they passed more ranches, and at every one they saw a detachment of red-capped soldiers. Rather than risk the delay of an engagement they kept on, although thirst was beginning to torture all of them. It was evident that the alarm had gone before them. Evening was coming on when they met a Scotchman who had been in the country for a year or two. He told them they were on the main road and advised them to stick to it; but several of the officers feared treachery from this passer-by and prevailed on Cameron to leave the highway. That night they struck off into the mountains again.

The little trail which they had taken dwindled out before they crossed the first ridge; and when they reached its summit they rested among the rocks till dawn came, revealing a dead world of naked peaks whose scorched sides stood out scarred by avalanches, cloaked by a wavering film of overheated air. A Mexican shepherd met them as they began their march that morning. They asked him of the country. He shook his head. There was no water in this part of the range, he told them.

They had been twenty-four hours without a drink. The horses were staggering from weakness. The shoes of the men were torn to pieces. That day they killed the animals and drank the blood. They stripped the meat from the bones. They made rude sandals from the saddle flaps. They started on; and a cloud of buzzards settled down upon the place before they had fairly left it.

There was no pretense at formation now; there were no orders from the officers. Cameron and one or two companions kept to the front, looking over the savage ridges and the sunbaked cañons from every high point, to pick the route. The others straggled along behind them. Some of those in the rear were throwing away their captured muskets. Now one dropped out, and now two or three departed up a branch cañon, lured away by fancies that the defile might hide water. So they toiled on for three days. Many were holding pebbles in their mouths; some were chewing the leaves of nigger head and prickly pear; and others were staggering aimlessly along, talking to themselves in thirst's delirium.

Cameron had sent three of his cowboys ahead to search for a spring. On the fourth day they returned and reported that there was not a drop of water in the country. The Scotchman looked about him. He saw some whose swollen tongues were protruding between their lips and some who were scooping dry dirt into their mouths. Then he gave the order to turn to the right. Better to risk the soldiers on the road than to die out here.

That evening they came out of the last cañon and saw the road ahead of them. Cameron was in the lead; some fifty odd men hung close behind him. The rest were scattered along for miles in little groups.

One of his cowboys pointed to a column of smoke which wound into the sky. The captain bade two go on and reconnoiter. They were back within a few hours with the news that squads of cavalry were patrolling the highway and a troop was guarding the next pass.

Their last chance was gone. They waited for the dawn; and with the sunrise came the soldiers. The Scotchman called his men together; they loaded their muskets and deployed to receive the enemy.

They were barely able to stand from weakness. But when an officer rode out before the column and ordered them to surrender Cameron replied:

"On one condition only. We shall be treated as prisoners of war."

And on that condition General Mexia, the governor of the province, received their arms. It is only fair to say that he did all a man could to see the promise kept.

For a week the cavalry were busy gathering in the last stragglers, until they had one hundred and eighty-one in custody. Four had escaped to make their way to the Rio Grande. Eight had died out in the sun-baked mountains. Within the next few days five more succumbed to what they had gone through.

Mexia saw to it that they were humanely treated. By his orders the thirst-stricken captives were given a few sips of water at first, and a few morsels of food. As time went on the allowance was increased, and they were taken back to Saltillo. Here they were held pending the arrival of instructions from Santa Anna.

It has been told how the lawyer Canales had an errand of his own with Mexico's ruler when he set forth to bring the news from Mier. Now after all these weeks of waiting he saw his opportunity to carry out his private mission. He did it so effectively that Santa Anna sent an order to execute the prisoners to the last man.

A storm of protest rose in Saltillo. A score of letters went to the dictator from prominent Mexicans who cried out against the black injustice. Governor Mexia wrote that he would resign his commission rather than do this thing. The American and British ministers in Mexico City added their voices to the clamor.

Then Santa Anna modified the sentence. Let one man of every ten be led out and shot, was the purport of his new instructions. He sent Colonel Domingo Huerta northward to carry them out; and before Huerta left the capital Canales had a quiet word with him.

On the twenty-fifth day of March, 1843, the thing was done. The Texans had been brought to the Hacienda Salado. In the room from which they had escaped more than a month before, they were lined up and Alfred S. Thurmand interpreted the dictator's written order to his companions.

Chance would decide on the victims. So said the document which Thurmand read. Two soldiers brought a jar; they poured into its mouth one hundred and fifty-nine white beans and seventeen black ones.

Colonel Domingo Huerta had done his work neatly, down to the last detail. No lottery ever looked fairer than this grim game which he had set before the Texans. The officers were to have the first choice. Cameron's name headed the list.

But William F. Wilson had been standing near the jar from the beginning and had noted something which had escaped the eyes of the others. Now, when Cameron stepped forward to plunge in his hand—

"Dip deep, captain," Wilson whispered.

For he remembered that the black beans had been poured in last and there had been no stirring.

Cameron glanced about the room.

"Well, boys, we have to draw," he said. "Let's be at it."

He thrust his fingers into the jar's mouth. Whether he had heard Wilson no man knows; it may have been blind luck. But when he withdrew his hand he held a white bean, and the cheers of his companions shook the rafters.

So Canales lost for the time being.

Then Wilson, who had some days since refused a proffer of intervention from the British consul at Saltillo—for he was an Englishman—saying that he meant to share whatever fate came to the Texans, took his turn and won his life. In after years the State of Texas named a county for him.

Captain Eastland was the first officer to get a black bean. He held it up for all to see, shrugged his shoulders and stepped back for the next man without changing his expression.

"Boys, I told you so," Major Cook said when his turn was done and he had his death sentence between his fingers. "I never failed to draw a prize." He shook his head and smiled. "Well, they only rob me of forty years."

He had just passed his thirtieth birthday.

When one plucked a white bean from the jar, those awaiting turns loudly cheered his luck which jeopardized their own chances by that much more.

"This," said one who had been a well-known gambler in Austin the Spring before, "beats raffling all to ——."

He was looking at his bean when he spoke, and it was black.

"Ruther draw for a Spanish hoss and lose him," shouted Talking Bill Moore, and won the right to live.

Two brothers by the name of Beard quarreled because one insisted that if he should get a white bean and his brother a black one, they must trade. The Mexican corporal in charge of the jar cut them short and both drew white.

When Henry Whaling saw his fate between his fingers, "They don't make much off of me," he said lightly. "I've killed more'n twenty-five of the yellow-bellies."

So it went on until the last black bean was shown; and then the shackles were knocked off from the luckless ones. They were taken out to die.

News moved slowly in those times. When the details of the execution reached the City of Mexico the remaining captives were on the road far south of the Hacienda Salado. Canales heard how Ewen Cameron had escaped, and he went again to Santa Anna. The dictator sent out another order. It met the procession of shackled prisoners one evening at a little hamlet within a hundred miles of the capital.

That night Ewen Cameron was taken from the room where they were housed; and in the morning when they were departing the Texans heard the volley of the firing squad which he was facing, as he had faced all his enemies in days gone by, with head erect, unflinching.

So he died. But his memory lived after him. It helped to steel the nerves of twenty of his cowboys who tunneled through the thick walls of the fortress of Perote a few months later under the noses of the guards. The most of them were recaptured; but a few managed to make their way back to their own country.

Months went by. The prisoners were kept at making roads and cleaning up the streets about the palace of Santa Anna. They never lost heart. And the bitterness which grew within them was made sterner every time the name of Ewen Cameron was spoken. There came a day when the efforts of the American and British ministers and the pleas of Santa Anna's wife resulted in an order from the dictator releasing those who still remained in custody.

So they returned to Texas and they told the story. Thomas J. Green, who was among the party escaping from Perote, wrote down the details of the whole expedition. And there was a time when all the Southwest rang with the name of Ewen Cameron.

The Mexican War came on. Major Walter P. Lane of Texas, who was leading a number of troops on a scouting expedition toward San Luis Potosi, departed from his route and crossed the mountains to the Hacienda Salado. Here he compelled the major domo to exhume the bones of the seventeen who had drawn black beans on that March afternoon five years before, and to furnish mules to transport them back across the Rio Grande. They were buried with full honors of war at La Grange, Texas.

But the grave of Ewen Cameron remained unmarked. So he sleeps, like many a one of the bold young riders who succeeded him and his companions of the Nueces, without so much as a headboard to remind men of his resting place.

Had he a monument, perhaps the most fitting inscription on its face would be:

EWEN CAMERON
THE FIRST COWBOY

A Complete Novelette

UNDER THE SKIN

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

Author of "One Lone White Man," "The Courtship of Captain Driscoll," etc.

SETH ORVILLE, little, sundried, and slightly drunk as usual, clambered up the warped gangplank of the *Lizzie R* and dropped hiccoughing to the deck. He turned and waited for the immaculate young man following him, and then set off at a sort of jog-trot toward the poop and its awnings that made the hot Samoan day bearable.

Reaching his objective, he dropped into one of the cane chairs that stood empty near the skylight of the saloon, and, drawing a limp handkerchief from his pocket, he fussily mopped his wrinkled brow. The immaculate young man dropped languidly into a similar chair near the rail and looked about him with a total lack of interest and a bored expression on his face.

One would never have thought, to observe Seth Orville, that he owned half the trading-schooners in the south, or that he had long since given up counting his yearly income. And shamelessly dressed for a millionaire was the yellow-skinned little man. His ducks were in need of a wash, he was unshaven, and so yellow was his skin that it was impossible to tell whether or not he needed a wash himself. His rope-soled canvas shoes were sound, but they had never been cleaned since the day they had been made, and in place of the white sun-helmet the immaculate young man sported, a stained brown affair adorned the older man's head and seemed to rest on his very ears. Even his tie was stained and rumpled, and gray with cigar-ash. Yet he was *the* Seth Orville, famed for his judgment of men, as well as for other things, and reputed to have the finest schooner captains of the seas in his employ.

It was hard for the immaculate young man to believe this, and whenever he looked at the drunken and seemingly doddering wreck opposite him his nose lifted superciliously. And all this Orville noticed, for his gray eyes, that not even drink could dim, took in more of what went on about them than men dreamed.

"Sam!"

The old man's dry voice rang out querulously. For a moment there was silence, and then the sound of a bunk-spring creaking came from the open skylight of the saloon, located under the poop-deck. A sleepy voice, full-throated and deep, called back—

"Hello?"

"Huh! Sleeping again! Get on deck!"

Puffing, slowly Orville seemed to collapse in his chair and doze. But under the rim of his sun-helmet his keen eyes watched the face of the man opposite him. The immaculate one took a cigaret case from his inside pocket and daintily lighted one of the white cylinders, flicking the burned match over the rail behind him. He crossed his legs with care, so as not to spoil the beautiful crease in his ducks, and swung his pipe-clayed shoes back and forth.

During his two weeks' stay in Apia every woman in the city had admired his curly brown hair and his clean-cut lips, sagging

"Under the Skin," copyright, 1922, by Albert Richard Wetjen.

slightly with dissipation, and had told him what a fine-looking fellow he was. He had reason to be languid and indifferent, and to appear above his surroundings.

There came a slow clatter of shoes on the steps of the saloon-companion and a man appeared, a man enormously fat and short, like a barrel from which the middle hoop has broken away. He was dressed in a pair of great-waisted dungaree pants, patched about the knees, a white cotton singlet, and a frayed straw hat perched far back on the top of his shining, sunburnt bald head.

He, too, was unshaven, but against the healthy bronze of his cheeks the short, stiff golden beard hardly showed at all. His arms were plump and very large, his hands rather small, and his blue eyes twinkled with good humor and a contented frame of mind, barely peeping from the rolls of fat that composed his face and well-nigh obscured his nose. He stretched his arms above his head and yawned, a monster yawn that exposed a magnificent set of white teeth. Then, catching sight of the perfectly dressed stranger, he shut his mouth suddenly and, lowering his arms, came forward, at the same time shooting a glance of curiosity at the huddled form of Orville.

The newcomer sat heavily on the taffrail near the stranger and waited, his hands half in the side pockets of his dungarees. Orville seemed to come to life with a start.

"Sleep, sleep, that's all you do," he grumbled.

Then sitting upright with a jerk:

"Meet m' frien' Rodney Hyde. Hyde, this is Cap'n Boggs."

The two men nodded to each other, Hyde patronizingly, the captain good-naturedly. The latter half-extended his right hand, but as Hyde turned his head away, apparently not seeing the action, the captain grimaced and looked inquiringly at Orville. The old man lifted his head just long enough to show the fat one that his left eye was closed in the shadow of his sun-helmet. Then he dropped his head again.

"Mishter Hyde is the son of a very old frien' of mine, cap—cap'n." Orville hiccoughed slightly and then cleared his throat. "He will be coming with you as supercargo. I want you t' show him the ropes gen-generally, and inform him on any sub-subject he may be unfamiliar with. Undershtand?"

The fat man grunted and stood up. For all his shortness and fatness he looked imposing. It was remarkable, the change that had come over him. The fat rolls of his face seemed to have tensed into muscles. His eyes suddenly leaped to view. The sunburn of his bald dome grew darker. He shot a look of scorn at the immaculate figure by his side and snorted. His stumpy forefinger shot out toward Orville.

"Am I 'blackbirding' this trip?"

"Hic—you are!"

"Then—" the fat one allowed his gaze to drift significantly to the after end of the saloon skylight, where several tomahawk marks sliced the woodwork—"then I shall want men!"

Orville leaped to his feet like a rubber ball on the rebound, and his cold gray eyes glared from under his bushy brows and his sun-helmet. He smote the palm of his left hand with this right fist and jog-trotted across to the captain, above whom he towered by at least an inch. His face was hidden from Hyde, who had turned round indignantly at the implied insult, and his left eye was closed again.

"—— you, Boggs! How dare you insult —insult my friends. Another word, b-by Losh, and you're fired. Come below. I want to talk to you," he cried shrilly, and with a satisfied grin Hyde sank back in his chair and went on smoking. He approved of employees being kept in their place.

His head sunk like a man crushed, Captain Sam Boggs followed his superior down the companion and into the saloon, and out of sight of the man on deck. Speaking in whispers so that the sound of their voices should not carry through the open skylight, the men discussed matters with many chuckles.

"What d'you think of the pup, Sam?"

"Clean built. Swelled head. Where'd you pick it up?"

"Can you make anything out of him?"

"Might. He's too soft for much now. I could kill him with a smack on the belt." The fat man chuckled and patted his own considerable paunch.

"Huh! He comes of good stock and oughta have something under his skin besides jelly. His dad was my partner in the Klondike in '97. He owns a dozen or so oil-wells now in the States, and this pup's been spending the income from 'em since he come outa college two years ago. Read this."

The old man pulled a crumpled letter from the inside of his coat and thrust it into the captain's hands. He read it aloud in a husky whisper.

> "DEAR SETH: The carrier of this is, I am sorry to say, my only son. The trouble with him is too much money, and perhaps I am to blame for attending too much to business instead of to him. I've threatened to disown him if he doesn't pull himself together, and have managed to get him to agree to start work. I wish you'd send him on a trip with one of your hard-case skippers and see if something can't be made out of him. I believe the boy is sound on the foundation, and knowing your hobby is making men I send him to you in the hope you'll enjoy the job. Shall be in Apia next Fall to see you and talk over old times, and to find out whether the boy's making good.
>
> "Regards as ever, BILL."

"That explains matters, S-Sam," hiccoughed Orville, nodding his head.

"What's my job? Am I the hard-case skipper?" inquired Captain Boggs as he folded up the letter and handed it back.

Orville chuckled mirthlessly.

"You are, my son. That's why you're blackbirding for me. Give the boy some dirt and see how he eats it. Make him or break him, I don't care which, and his dad'd rather see him dead than a lounge lizard for life. A hundred pounds if you make him, Sam, and I'll fire you if you don't!"

"Anything goes?"

"Anything short of murder."

The captain grinned expansively and gazed up at the skylight. He thought for a while, and his grin broadened.

"I'll take the job," he said at last, and Orville thumped his fat shoulders enthusiastically and hiccoughed.

The captain salvaged a bottle of gin from the locker and, procuring two glasses, poured out a stiff jolt.

"Don't know what I'd do without you, Sam," grunted the millionaire as he drained his glass.

The captain grunted in return and led the way on deck again.

"Easy till you get him to sea," whispered Orville as they emerged from the saloon-hatch. The captain nodded and addressed the languid youth.

"If you'd get your dunnage aboard some time this evening I'd be obliged, Mr. Hyde," he said in silky tones. "I can sign you on then, and we sail at dawn."

"Very well, captain, I'll do my best," the young man replied.

He rose to his feet, shook out the creases in his ducks, and tossed a burned-out cigaret overboard.

"May I ask where we are bound for?"

"Solomon Islands," said the captain shortly.

"Is it possible for me to get mail there? I have——"

"I'll arrange about that," put in Orville irritably as the captain's face began to redden and his eyes gleam. "Let's go ashore and get a drink now. This climate never did agree with me."

Mopping his forehead with his handkerchief again, the old man jog-trotted down the gangway and made for the saloon, while the son of his oldest friend trailed along in his wake. Captain Boggs bit off a chew of tobacco and spat thoughtfully overside as he watched the pair go. First he snorted disgustedly, but later his genial smile came back.

"One hundred pounds," he murmured, "is not to be sneezed at. I think, Mr. Rodney Hyde, that we shall become quite well-acquainted in the near future."

THE *Lizzie R* put to sea with the first touch of dawn in the east and the turn of the tide, and beat out from the harbor and the coast to commence the long run northwest to the Solomons.

Still in his immaculate whites, Rodney Hyde smoked endless cigarets as he walked the poop, and shivered slightly in the chill air that had descended with the approach of morning. He was somewhat sleepy and tired, and irritated that he had ever consented to come on such an outlandish venture just to please his father, who had a total lack of understanding of the higher things. It was the first time since he had left college that Hyde had been up before nine o'clock, and he didn't like it.

Aft, near the wheel, where a Samoan seaman was steering, stood Captain Boggs and another white man, a lean, brown-mustached individual, dressed in a worn-out pair of pajama pants, a blue cotton shirt, open all the way down the chest, and a straw hat similar to the captain's. He was barefooted, and carried a large sheath-knife on the strap he wore as a belt. He was about five feet eight inches in height, the same as Hyde, and which was exactly eight inches taller than the captain, but he looked as if he were composed of tree roots, so knotty were his thin arms and legs, and so corded his scrawny throat.

Hyde had been introduced to him some time before, learning his name was Trelawney, the mate of the *Lizzie R*, and for all his languid indifference Hyde had felt a cold shiver as he clasped the mate's hand and met the hard blue eyes boring into his own.

It was some relief, thought Hyde, as he paced up and down and lifted his eyebrows at the two men aft, that he was a supercargo on board, with little physical labor to do, and not a great deal of mental. One voyage to prove to Bill Hyde back in the States that he could work if he wanted to, and then no doubt the regular monthly allowance would start again. The present voyage was an affair to be tolerated because of its necessity.

Boggs and his mate came slowly along the poop to the forward taffrail, where the captain beckoned to his supercargo. The fat face of the man now looked as it had looked when he had made the insulting remark on the previous day, thought Hyde as he approached his superior and caressed the fantom moustache he was trying to raise with his finger tips.

Boggs pointed to the heap of trunks and leather grips piled against the saloon skylight. The pile represented Hyde's dunnage. Boggs personally went to sea, for a voyage of an indefinite period, with a spare suit of dungarees and half a dozen cotton singlets, and such an amount of clothes as his supercargo seemed to possess seemed to him a matter for jest. The mate was grinning expectantly, and Hyde knew a moment of uneasiness as he approached the pair.

"Take your dunnage off the poop and get for'ard," snarled the captain, glaring up into the face of his surprized supercargo.

Hyde stiffened and drew back.

"I beg your pardon."

"Don't answer me back! Take your dunnage and get for'ard. You live in the fo'c's'le on this packet. And call me sir when you speak to me."

"Why—" commenced the astounded young man.

He licked his suddenly dry lips and looked from the captain to the mate and back. The mate's jaw was gaping with anticipation, and his somewhat cruel eyes were twinkling.

"Why, I thought my position, supercargo, was an officer's berth. I was told——"

"Shut yer trap! On this ship supercargoes get for'ard and work with the crew. Jump now!"

"But——"

"Are you going!"

Hyde's temper got the better of him. He went white to the lips, and his languid air of indifference fell away. He was as tense as a bundle of whipcord.

"I'm —— if I——"

He would never have believed that a man of such gross fatness could move so quickly. A flash of light seemed to sear his brain, and darkness began to fall. He was aware that his left jaw had gone numb, and he collapsed limply.

Assisted by the mate, Boggs lifted the inert figure and dropped it carefully over the forward taffrail on to the main deck. Then he pitched all the trunks and grips down without so much care, after which each resumed his pacing along the weather deck as if nothing had happened.

Hyde came to, aware of a blinding light and of a fierce heat that beat upon his face. He tried to open his eyes, but they watered so he could not. He groped to a sitting posture with a groan and then realized he had been trying to outstare the rising sun. He was no longer under the cool shade of the awnings. He felt sore and bruised all over, and looked about in bewilderment at the clutter of grips and trunks about him. His beautifully modeled sun-helmet caught his eye. It lay in the scuppers and had spots of tar on it where it had rolled over the deck seams. The sound of Captain Boggs' throaty chuckle at something the lean mate was saying came to the young man's ears. Then he remembered, and with remembrance came rage and indignation.

He scrambled to his feet and staggered across the heaving deck to the poop-companion. Dizzily he went up, gripping tight to the canvas-covered rails, until he reached the poop. Boggs and the mate were walking toward him in their promenade, looking cool and collected in the grateful shade. Boggs stopped short, apparently surprized, as the bloody-faced, disheveled Hyde advanced upon him.

"No man can hit me," sobbed the bewildered young man. "I'll tell Mr. Orville about this, you vicious——"

"Get off my poop!" roared the captain.

He bounced forward, his whole body aquiver with rage. His fist took Hyde in the stomach and doubled him up. Hyde's own feeble blow barely tapped the captain's cheek.

"What! Mutiny! Strike me? Get my revolver, Mr. Trelawney."

Then the captain's other fist caught Hyde's patrician nose, and the blood flew wide. Boggs literally lifted the young man off his feet, ran him to the head of the companion and pitched him down. Then he called to two grinning Samoan seamen, who stood by the mainmast and watched this rather unusual display by their generally good-tempered master.

"You take him for'ard and give him a bunk. Take these for'ard, too, and help yourself." He pointed to the cluttered baggage, and with a joyful yelp the natives ran to gather it in.

Hyde groped about, blind with the blood in his eyes, and he felt sure the world had come to an end. His world certainly had. He sobbed, uncontrolled, like a child, and nursed his swimming head. Nor did he know what was happening when he was carried forward by the curious Samoans and pitched into a bunk that crawled with fat cockroaches and smelled of bilge and mildewed copra.

For Rodney Hyde a cataclysm had certainly occurred. As the son of Willian Hyde, the millionaire oil man, he had received respect, attention to his wishes, and extreme civility. As the supercargo of the blackbirder *Lizzie R* he received none of the above. Rather he received their antithesis.

He lived, ate, slept and worked with the eight Samoan seamen housed down forward in the stuffy little forecastle, right in the bows of the schooner. He learned—it was rather painful for him at first—to steer, to splice and to haul. Boggs was his teacher mostly, though the mate was a good helper. And in the course of learning the above three very necessary subjects, Hyde learned other things.

He learned, for instance, that it was far less painful to call the captain and the mate "sir," when speaking to them, than not to. He learned that he must always be on deck the moment eight bells rang, and to come on deck between eight bells, were he called, without mentioning that it was his watch below. In short, he learned, and he grew wise in the ethics of discipline.

When on deck he was sullen and moody, always in rebellion, rebellion expressed in his every movement. He could not fathom the astonishing thing that had happened to bring him where he was. His brain seemed to have gone numb, and was dominated by only one thought. He grew like a caged panther temporarily tamed, but waiting for its master to make just one false move. Only the four Samoans in his watch knew how he lay in his stinking bunk and sobbed quietly for hours at a time, his former supercilious pride in ruins, his illusions, on the sanctity of his caste from common happenings, in ashes.

Other changes came to him. The soft white hands that had been his mother's pride and his own grew coarse with the work they were put to. His carefully kept nails broke repeatedly and grew hard. Also, and incidentally, the flabbiness of his muscles sweated itself out with many aches, and firm tissue took its place. Though he was not aware of it, he felt better than he had ever felt in his life, and the hatred he had come to bear toward Captain Boggs gave him a reason for living, which he had not had before.

He came to look on the captain as the very essence of brutal evil, and the mate as his able satellite. He knew no fear of the captain, but he did know, from painful experience, that he was no match for the gross mountain of fat in a hand-to-hand combat. The mate was different. Hyde thought that one day, under different conditions, he could stand up to the mate shoulder to shoulder, and batter him down.

He tried it one morning when the captain was not on deck, when the mate cuffed him for coiling the brace slack left-handed, and after ten gory minutes subsided to the scuppers, breathing heavily with the pain of battered ribs, and glaring malevolently up at the grinning mate, whom he had not even marked. But perhaps the fact that the mate used a belaying-pin may have had something to do with the victory. He decided next time he would take care the mate was near no such weapons.

His trunks and grips of perfectly tailored clothes the Samoan seamen, encouraged by the captain, confiscated and wore impartially. Nor did Hyde attempt to fight for his belongings. For one reason the weakest of the Samoans was strong enough to kill him with a blow, was strong enough to kill even the captain. But in Boggs' case the authority he possessed, the weight of the law behind him, and the fact that he carried a gun made him secure.

But Hyde had none of the above to shelter behind, and knowing that they would not be reprimanded by the captain, sensing that the young white man was out of favor for some unknown reason, the seamen would not have hesitated to strike him. And Hyde, aware of all this, lay in his bunk and sullenly watched the natives dress up in his clothes, and put the score down against Captain Boggs, to be paid in full some day.

He did not stop to reason why the captain should treat him worse than the meanest native aboard. If he did ever think of the matter he decided it was an innate love of cruelty in the fat man's makeup. But most of his waking hours were spent devising some means by which he could get himself out of the chaos into which he had by some misunderstanding fallen.

He was of a different race and of a different class of intellect from the four broad-faced Samoans he lived with, and he kept away from them as much as possible, his erstwhile fastidious taste shocked at every action they made. He took his food apart and ate it in solitude. He never spoke. And when the seamen demanded he should take his turn with them keeping the little forecastle clean he treated their demands with silent contempt. He was acquiring pride, and a deeper, better pride than he had ever had before.

It wasn't clothes, superficial culture or money that distinguished one man from another, one race from another. It was something internal, something deeper than the exterior, something unnamable that stiffened the backbone and gave to the mind the consciousness that it was the superior. And because of this new philosophy Hyde was beginning to evolve, he refused to wash dishes for the Samoans, to scrub the forecastle floor for them, to wait on them at all. Had they been white sailors he would hardly have refused.

In the old days his refusal would have been based on the fact that the work would have spoiled his hands, was beneath him. But now his refusal was based on more solid stuff.

The Samoans complained to the captain, and he called Hyde aft one dog-watch and ordered him to take his turn as "peggy." Perfectly aware of what he was delivering himself to, Hyde shook his head, but spoke no word. And when the captain knocked him down he still shook his head. For the first time he took his beating without an outburst of rage. And not until the captain drew back his foot, as if to kick his prostrate supercargo, did he speak, tensely, almost viciously.

"You can kill me, but I'll never wait on kanakas!"

Captain Boggs lowered his foot and started intently at the defiant young man, who ran a shaking hand across his mouth to wipe the blood from his lips. The captain's glance was curious and critical. He noticed the fire in the eyes, the set of the jaw. He had made a man out of Hyde perhaps, but at the expense of the man's hatred. He frowned for a moment.

"You needn't 'peggy' for the crew," he said at last. "Get for'ard."

Hyde dragged to his feet and glared haggardly down at the man who had well-nigh broken his spirit. It seemed so easy to defeat such a fat, awkward-looking man. And the wide, creased face was but a few inches from his clenched fist. But he knew of old what would happen should he strike. He shook with the effort to control himself, and snarled like a wild beast.

"Some day I'm going to tear the face off of you," he spat out; and, turning, he shambled forward, still wiping his cut lip.

The captain stood with his thumbs in his belt and watched his supercargo go down the companion to the main deck. A thought seemed to come to him.

"Hyde!" he called, softly, so that the watch working near the main hatch did not hear.

The unshaven, tousle-haired figure turned. His singlet was greasy and torn, his arms sun-blistered and rope-scarred, his feet bare and spotted with tar. He had become utterly indifferent to his appearance.

"Don't forget, Hyde—" the captain stopped and ran an insolent eye up and down his supercargo—"don't forget, ever, that you're a white man."

With a muttered oath of impatience Hyde swung round and continued forward. The captain turned to the mate, who had come up behind him.

"By the time we dock in Apia, Trelawney, he'll be good enough to beat up the pair of us," he said.

But the mate only sneered and hitched his belt higher. He had been drinking and was feeling in a vicious mood.

Below in the forecastle, sitting on the edge of his bunk, his head sunk in his hands, Hyde gave himself over to the first clear thinking he had done since the morning he had been pitched off the *Lizzie R's* poop. The captain's words burned in his brain—

"Don't forget, ever, that you're a white man."

Scene by scene he reviewed his life. His boyhood in Oakland, his youth in schools where only the sons of wealthy men were admitted, his young manhood at Harvard and in travel. And all through he remembered there had never been any lack of money, never need to worry or to work, always servants and fine clothes and warm houses. He remembered his father; he had always more or less despised his father, rough, rugged, uncouth of speech and manners, his hands distorted with past toil. But he now remembered other things in connection with his father.

Men had treated him with respect, real respect. His father was a power in the land, had done something worth doing. He had put sheep where before there were no sheep, cattle where there had been no cattle, water and trees where before had been only desert, towns and cities where there had been no living man. When Hyde came to think of it he had a father to be proud of.

As for himself, he had been given respect, certainly, but it had been for his father's sake, a tolerant respect. He blushed as he thought of it. Tolerated for his father's sake! No wonder the old man had called him a waster. He had done nothing to entitle him to a place in the order of things. Here, on the blackbirder, *Lizzie R*, he was ranked according to his worth and achievements, and where was he? The lowest thing aboard. He would transvalue his values and would prove to men that he was his father's son, of the same hardness and solid stock. He would show the Samoans, the Trelawneys and the Boggses of the world that he was a better man than they. Tolerated for his father's sake! In the future he would be respected for his own!

THERE occurred that afternoon something that added greatly to Hyde's confidence in himself, and to his determination to prove that he was as good as other men in things for which they were respected.

It was just after eight bells, in the afternoon watch. Hyde was steering, half-asleep, enjoying the warm, soothing wind that caressed his sun-blistered flesh and rippled his tousled hair. There was hardly the need of a man at the wheel. A grommet slipped over the spokes would have held the *Lizzie R* to her course. But whoever else was allowed to spend his watch on deck sleeping under the scanty awnings forward, Captain Boggs had made it a rule that Hyde should not. He had to keep his watch, every watch, and every minute of every watch. Never was a man schooled more harshly on the toughest of tough clipper-ships.

The mate came up from the saloon and grinned evilly at Hyde as he stepped from the companion to the poop-deck. The hatch of the skylight opened aft, and it was but a pace from the storm-step to the binnacle and the wheel. The captain was dozing below in his cane chair with a glass of luke-warm beer at his elbow, and a burned-out cigar between his lips. Though the mate stood so close to him, Hyde was not aware of his presence until he spoke.

"Wake up and get on yer course," he snarled, his bony fist catching Hyde under the heart with a viciousness that temporarily winded the younger man.

Hyde gasped as his head came up with a jerk, and he blinked awake. He did not know what had happened until his eyes fell on the mate, and then he scowled as he labored to get back his breath. He knew the mate had disturbed him only from wantonness, from love of cruelty, and the knowledge made him furious. The mate had been drinking heavily again, and he failed to see the danger singals flaming in the other's eyes. Besides, why should he worry?

Had he not a dozen times before battered Hyde to unconsciousness?

The viciousness of the man welled up; and, lurching forward, he swung his fist again. He had come to regard Hyde as an object on which any spite could be vented, the captain not allowing any one but himself to touch the Samoan seamen. But this time the mate had no belaying-pin, and Hyde was throbbing with a new-found pride. He did not wait for the mate's next blow to land.

He let go the wheel and, dodging the mate's fist, stepped clear to one side. The mate swore, surprized that he should miss, and stumbled round the binnacle, across the deck to where Hyde stood waiting white to the lips, erect and watching, his scarred hands on his hips and every muscle in his iron-hard body taut and coiled like a spring.

"Run from me, would yer?" spat out the mate, taking a stumbling swing at Hyde's head.

The younger man swayed ever so slightly, and as the mate overbalanced with the force of his own blow he hit him between the eyes with a driving power he had not thought his arms possessed. The mate went backward and brought up against the side of the saloon skylight with a crash that jarred the whole poop and sobered him immediately. The captain, below in his chair, woke with a start and, guessing what was taking place by the thud and scrambling shuffle of feet on the deck overhead, rose and padded silently up the saloon companion.

The mate, over his first surprize at being hit, came back with a rush. Hyde was forced to the rail, hitting hard and straight, where the mate hammered him savagely about the face and throat. But the younger man was in the better trim. He had not smoked nor drunk in weeks. And he was possessed of the fire that is half the battle. He did not flinch, but stood and gave as good as he received. A smashing drive of his took the mate on the solar plexus, and he faltered and doubled about his middle. Nor did Hyde spare him.

All the burning sense of injustice that had boiled ceaselessly within him from the first day aboard the *Lizzie R* he vented on the groggy mate. He pounded the lean, stringy body to a red surface; he split the flesh over the bony cheeks, heedless of his own bleeding knuckles. And then, when at the last his fist connected with the mate's protruding jaw, and the man went out like a candle snuffed, Hyde knew the greatest thrill of his life, the greatest thrill that comes to a man but once in a lifetime—the thrill of the first conquest. He had fought and beaten his man. He had proved himself to himself, and shown that there was something in him that deserved recognition. He stood back and breathed heavily, elated and triumphant.

There was a faint padding on the deck at his side; and, turning, he saw the captain regarding him intently, his fat face set sternly. The elation went out of him. He could hardly hope to beat the captain when fresh, and after his exhausting fray the fat man would find him easy to handle. But outwardly he gave no sign. His eye was steady as he returned look for look, and his jaw was set firm.

And to his surprize Captain Boggs did not fly into one of his spontaneous rages; he made no attempt to hit him. The captain's voice was even genial as he looked down at his wreck of a mate. The hardness went from the fat face, a tinge of respect showed in the eyes.

"He had it coming to him. You saved me a job, Hyde. Pack your dunnage and move aft tonight. The supercargo's cabin is next to mine."

"Move aft, sir!" Hyde could hardly believe his ears.

The captain nodded, and his broad face widened in a grin.

"We reach Ysabel tomorrow, and there your supercargo work starts. Better watch out for Trelawney; he'll get you for this."

Abruptly the captain turned and padded back to his chair and his beer, his thin pajamas tight-fitting round his monstrous form, his bald dome shining mahogany in the awning shadow. He might have been chuckling from the way his shoulders shook. There was something under the skin of William Hyde's boy after all. It took a good man to beat up on "Buck" Trelawney, whose very reputation and sinister form won him half of his combats.

Somewhat puzzled, but with a still newer and greater pride thrilling through him, Hyde went back to the wheel to finish his watch, his last one as a seaman. Five minutes later the mate staggered to his feet and went below without so much as a glance at the man who had defeated him, so dazed were his faculties. He knew only a great desire to lie down somewhere dark, and rest. He could think of revenge later on.

WITH the first flush of the next dawn the *Lizzie R* drew near to her destination, a jungle-fringed river-mouth on the southern coast of the savage island of Ysabel in the terrible Solomon group.

Strange changes took place on board the schooner. In place of the happy-go-lucky, care-free spirit that had prevailed on board since her sailing from Apia, a spirit of alert watchfulness, of tense expectation, seemed to step in. Heavy iron stanchions were brought from the shelter-deck of the main hold and dropped through the dead-eyes on the rail and into the sockets in the scuppers, so that they stood rigidly upright, each about seven feet high, completely encircling the ship.

To make them doubly secure they were lashed to the rail with fine wire, and then stayed to each other. Between the stanchions strong barbed wire was then laced and interlaced, forming a network utterly impassable to naked bodies. Only one gap was left, a narrow opening opposite the whale-boat lashed at the foot of the mainmast.

After these preliminary preparations were gone through, the Samoans filed up on to the poop and received each a repeating rifle and a bandoleer of cartridges from the hand of Captain Boggs. The mate and the captain each buckled on two heavy cartridge belts and revolvers, and Hyde was similarly equipped.

"Whatever happens stay on the poop and keep close to me," warned the fat captain as he handed his supercargo his weapons. "Remember you're green. We're going into one of the most dangerous places in the world, where the natives look on white men as an edible luxury. All personal grievances must be dropped. White men have to stand together in tight corners, *savve?*"

Hyde nodded assent as he strapped on his belts. There was a new note he detected in the captain's voice—a note, was it of respect? Was the fat man getting afraid of him because he had beaten Trelawney? Most brutal men were cowards at the core. But somehow he did not think Captain Boggs was a coward. One thing—he thrilled as he thought of it—the respect in the captain's voice was in some measure deserved. He had gained it by doing something. It was not given for his father's sake. And so Hyde listened eagerly every time the captain spoke to him, while he hated him none the less.

Happening to pass the skylight of the saloon, he noticed the tomahawk marks on the woodwork and shuddered.

"Cap'n Davies—he was master of the *Lizzie* 'fore Cap'n Boggs took her—fought with ten kanakas by that there skylight," he remembered the mate had said one day. "Tough 'un was Davies. They ripped him open, chopped off his arm, but he fought with the other. 'Course they got him in the end, but he sure put up a fight. A man usually passes out that way if he stays too long at blackbirding. The kanakas get him. They'll get Boggs if he makes too many trips. They'll get me. There's none too old or too wise to get caught."

Fear swept through Ronald Hyde. The vivid imagination he possessed completed what the mate's remembered words had started. For the first time in his life the young man was in a position, was going into a place, where he took that same life in his hands. He remembered many things besides the old tomahawk marks on the saloon skylight; the captain's own words, the guns served out, the barbed-wire fence. He glanced down at his revolvers with a new understanding. There would be killings, perhaps. His guns represented his right to live in a hostile environment. And what a right! He had never shot a revolver in his life before. The most he had ever handled was a .22 rifle, and that on a warm, covered range, where there was no imperative need to hit the target.

He wiped the beaded sweat from his forehead and groaned with the sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. He felt as he had felt when a child and his nurse had left him alone in the dark. He wanted to hide his head. He looked at the dense green of the sullen jungle they were approaching. A few gaudy birds squawked and fluttered in the foliage, and from the deeper jungle came the dull hum of a myriad insects. That was all. But Hyde knew, from conversations he had heard between the mate and the captain, that such a vacant-looking shore might be teeming with life. Perhaps even now a thousand savage eyes were watching the schooner draw near.

He stumbled to the rail and put out a shaking hand to steady himself. The touch of the wood comforted him. He looked along the deck to where the Samoan seamen were gathered, talking in low tones among themselves and resting carelessly on the muzzles of their rifles. They were not afraid; they gave no sign of fear.

Hyde stiffened. Was he afraid when kanakas were not? He gritted his teeth and drew away from the rail.

When Captain Boggs came round the side of the skylight on a tour of the poop to see that all was as it should be, Hyde had fought out his battle and was standing, somewhat weak, but calm, near the helmsman. He felt vastly relieved that he had controlled himself and decided on his course of action.

"Feel nervy?" the captain asked, not unkindly.

"A little," Hyde said with truth.

The captain chuckled throatily and patted his paunch with his fat hands.

"Soon pass off, son, soon pass off. I was so scared my first trip to these parts I shook all over. I'm scared right now, though you mayn't think it. It's bluff that wins battles in the Islands, son. The kanakas bluff that they're not afraid of you, which they are, and you bluff you're not afraid of them, which you really are. And as both sides know exactly how matters stand, it's merely a case of who can bluff the hardest. Of course, sometimes the bluff's called, and then it's a case of shoot quick. But that's not often. These guns are bluff, in a way. We probably shan't fire a shot at all."

He continued his waddling stroll, and Hyde watched him go with mingled feelings.

There was something likable about the captain. He seemed nothing more than a vast mountain of good humor, except when he was crossed badly, or when he had a deliberate spite on some one, as he had evidently had with Hyde. And he must be a man in every sense of the word to run the *Lizzie R*, as he had run other ships, into far and unknown harbors in the most savage parts of the world, miles from law and order. And from each trip he brought back, and doubtless would continue to bring back, not only his head safe on his shoulders, but his ship intact and a hundred or more kinky-haired, tooth-filed cannibals to work on his master's plantations.

His master, Seth Orville, too, was likable in some subtle way. It came to Hyde as a sudden revelation that it was, after all, not so much the way men dressed or talked, not so much what they drank or how they conducted themselves in their play. It was what they *did* when face to face with a great crisis. It was their actions at times when actions were needed that counted. Some of the world's greatest generals, admirals, geniuses, had been the world's greatest fools in many things.

The vital spark of worth hid under the most unlikely exteriors, and was not to be found under exteriors where it would be expected. But the world had to judge a man by the result of that vital spark, and until a man proved that he had it he could not complain were he misjudged by all.

Now Hyde came to think of it, Seth Orville was of the type in which there seemed to be something hidden. His exterior now belied the tales men told of his earlier days. But there was something about the man, something under the drunken, sun-shriveled exterior that hinted of iron. His own father, Hyde remembered, had the same iron in him, though his exterior betrayed it plainly. Captain Boggs had the iron in him; Hyde had seen it himself on occasion, had felt the consequences of its awakening.

Even the drunken Trelawney was possessed of something besides meanness and a desire for liquor. Hyde wondered whether he had anything in himself that would show forth at the time of need. He did not know. He had never had the opportunity to tell. He had never been up against any crisis until the previous half-hour, when he fought back his fear; the fear imagination had conjured. He was not satisfied. Perhaps in a great crisis he would fail. It remained to be seen.

He knew that should he fail, the respect would go from the captain's voice, from the voice of all men. But should he succeed, should the vital spark, the iron, peep forth and lead to great triumphs, he knew that he could walk the world and look all men in the eyes, knowing he was as good as they, had been tried and not found wanting, was entitled to respect for what he had himself done, and not for what his father had done before him. He would be lord of lesser men and bodies, but, more important than all, he would be lord of himself.

The schooner did not creep a very great way into the bottle-shaped river-mouth before she came to and dropped anchor, the sound of the cable starting up flocks of terns. The cable was not let out too much, so that it would be easy to knock clear the shackle and make a quick getaway in case of necessity. With a short cable the shackle-pin would come out more easily, and there would not be so much chain lost.

For perhaps sixty yards on either beam there was the water, clear sea-water shot with sudden streams and rufflings of dark, muddy river-water. Then came the jungle, without a beach to fringe it, the fifty-foot sago and mangroves leaning over the water's edge. Still there was no sign of human life.

It was a dangerous place for recruiting, and the majority of blackbirding ships avoided it, which was principally the reason why Captain Boggs chose it as his stamping-ground. He had been there three or four times before, and on each occasion had secured a shelter-deck full of stalwart savages, each man signed on for three or four years to work on the copra plantations of Seth Orville.

The less frequently ships went to a spot the more cheaply it was possible to get laborers for, and the more easily it was to coax an obstinate chief into letting them come. And so it was that Captain Boggs ran his ship into the river-mouth on the coast of Ysabel, and risked his head by his daring.

TWO Samoans went forward to the bows of the schooner, and, squatting on the deck, their rifles between their knees, watched each one side of the ship. The Samoan at the wheel, as soon as the anchor was dropped and he could relinquish his charge, squatted down likewise, where he stood, and fondled his weapon, while his eyes watched the shores for any suspicious sign. Two other seamen, the best shots, went up aloft and took their places in the large vinegar barrel that had been lashed to the maintop only that morning. From their commanding eminence they could cover the whole ship and the water alongside as well.

Captain Boggs, after one last keen glance around, sat himself heavily in his cane chair near the port rail, and, twisting his holster to the front so as to be handy in case of surprize, he lighted a cigar and proceeded to enjoy it. The mate—he had continued his heavy drinking despite the threats of the captain—sat hunched on top of the low saloon skylight, his swollen and battered face in his hands, glaring moodily at the white deck planking, lined evenly with the pitch seams that bubbled here and there with the fierce heat that smashed even through the heavy awnings.

Hyde sat on the top of a case of plug trade-tobacco, piled with other assorted cases of trade-goods on the poop near the forward taffrail, where they had been brought from the main hold. The other three seamen lounged about in the sparse shadow of the mainmast, opposite the gap in the wire fence. The stage seemed to be laid and waiting for something, for what Hyde did not know, though he had an uneasy time guessing. He concluded that he was the only person ignorant on board.

The jungle glared and brooded on, seemingly indifferent to the cares and anxieties of man; the insects never ceased their monotonous humming, the croaking terns wheeled and settled at last from view, and the gaudy birds still fluttered indifferently among the foliage. Time passed.

Captain Boggs tossed the burned-out stump of his cigar overboard and lighted another. He seemed quite at his ease. The mate drowsed and mumbled to himself on the skylight. Even the half-fearful Hyde was feeling sleepy. He wondered what had come over the ship. Everybody, everything seemed drowsy. Then it occurred to him that perhaps this was part of the game of bluff the captain had spoke about. He sat up and began to take notice, his eyes slowly roving over the jungle edge. Here and there he noted the gaudy birds would flutter up with a more than usually loud squawk, as if something disturbed them. Hyde began to feel mildly excited.

Then something happened suddenly, as it always does in the Islands. From some hidden creek a canoe shot out, a clumsy-looking affair, devoid of outriggers and unlike the graceful canoes of the southern islands. It was propelled by four massive-chested, naked savages, their ear-lobes swinging as they paddled with an assortment of junk thrust through distended holes, their nose cartilages split with skewers and rings of pearl-shell, necklaces of teeth and coral round their throats. One had a sort of tawny-looking skin for a girdle.

In the rear end of the canoe sat an old man. Round his shriveled and scrawny neck he wore a string of what might have been monkey-skulls, or perhaps the skulls of babies. Otherwise he was naked. His chest was shrunken and withered and thick with dirt and old scars, his arms skeleton-like in their thinness. His head was bald and wrinkled all over, as if he had his brows perpetually raised; from the chin up, over the skull, to the nape of the neck, like a walnut-shell, wrinkled and furrowed. His eyes—of a hollow, burning black, by no means faded—seemed to be lidless, for he never closed them or winked the drifting dust from them. Also they seemed devoid of lashes. No weapons were visible in the canoe.

The Samoan watching by the *Lizzie R's* wheel called out in a low voice, and the captain, getting up from his chair, with no sign of haste strolled easily round the skylight to the starboard side of the poop, toward which the canoe was heading. The mate lifted his head with an ugly yawn and shambled to his feet. Hyde nervously fumbled with his revolver butts and wondered what he was expected to do.

The canoe shot alongside and the paddlers backed water, their fierce eyes glaring up at the fat face of the captain, wreathed in smiles as he bent over the rail and looked down.

"I hope you are well, Tiaga. I hope your wives are well. I hope your children are well. And I hope your foes will rot where they stand. Also I hope your ancestors are sleeping easily with the dead and not troubling your sleep at nights," said the captain cheerfully, in the quaint language of the South Sea traders, *bêche-de-mer* English.

Tiaga, chief of the coast tribes of Ysabel, looked up lazily, insolently, and cracked a cynical smile. Boggs and he were old friends. There was the mark of the captain's bullet still showing along the old cannibal's arm. And a scar of frightful dimensions still graced the right thigh of the captain where the chief's spear had caught him in a well-nigh forgotten fight, years before. Dearly would Tiaga have loved to see such a wondrously fat man adorning the stones of the "long-pig" ovens, and the wonderfully fat face turning gracefully in the head-smoke of the devil-devil house. And the captain, who knew very well what was passing in the old cannibal's mind, smiled sweetly, while he kept his hand near the butt of his revolver. A spear could be snatched from concealment and thrust upward with astonishing swiftness.

"It is well with me, except that I am bothered with the night mists and the ships that come unasked into my river. Also I am short of tobacco," grunted Tiaga uncivilly, disappointed that the captain showed no signs of becoming careless with years.

"It seems that we both need something," chuckled the captain throatily. "I need strong men, for whom I shall pay, and you need tobacco, which I shall give you without payment. Am I not indeed a king of generosity?"

"I did not say I needed tobacco," responded the chief surlily. "I think I shall not smoke any more. It is a pig's habit, and my nose is losing its taste."

And so the talk went on, back and forth, for at least half an hour, the old cannibal speculating whether he could spear the captain before the latter could draw his revolver, the captain watching every move and giving an exhibition of his supreme contempt for anything the chief might attempt to do. And the talk ended as such talks had ended in the past. The old chief condescended to totter grumblingly aboard and accept half a case of trade-tobacco, while the four men who had come with him squatted indifferently by the main hatch-coamings and chewed betel-nut and looked with glittering eyes on the wealth and richness that lay about them.

Another half-hour of skilful talk back and forth, a few drinks and a few more presents, and Tiaga was in a more mellow and melting mood. He whistled shrilly from where he sat on the poop, and with narrowed eyes watched a hundred or more canoes shoot from many hidden creeks and backwaters and come skimming across the alternately muddy and then clear streaks of water.

There were no weapons in view even yet, but the captain well knew that much can be concealed under the matting of banana-leaves which the floor of every canoe possessed. Much had been hidden under the matting before, the captain remembered, and his old spear-scar seemed to twinge in recollection too.

The utter silence with which the canoes came shook Hyde's nerves more than he cared to admit. He could see the whites of the natives' eyes shining; he could see the paddles dip, surge and come soundlessly forth. The sweating bodies fascinated him, as did the slithering muscles across the brawny chests. He rose uneasily to his feet and moved away from the pile of trade-goods, watching the captain.

The fat man's face was still wreathed in smiles as he jested with the old cannibal. It seemed he had nothing but friendliness for the chief and was totally unaware of the savage horde pouring on his ship. Hyde admired his coolness and was steadied himself by the example. The mate, he noticed, lurched drunkenly away amidships and joined the three awaiting Samoan seamen by the gap opposite the mainmast.

The canoes, still in dead silence, surged alongside, and their occupants came aboard. Twenty men the mate counted off, and then he refused to allow any more on deck. The Samoans' rifles came down to their hips; their fingers twitched round the trigger. They forced the disappointed and sullen savages back into the canoes. They scowled as they dropped from the rail and took to muttering amongst themselves.

Tiaga noticed all these things from the corner of his eye as he hunched up uncomfortably in the cane chair opposite from the captain. The twenty men allowed aboard came slowly aft, herded by the mate and one of the seamen. Hyde uneasily watched the fine-muscled savages pour up the poop-companion, shining with oil and sweat, and group behind their sitting chief.

With a forefinger cut off at the first joint in some long-forgotten affray, Tiaga pointed out first one man and then another, and those he pointed out stepped sullenly to one side, apart from their comrades.

Hyde, under the captain's instructions, set up a little baize-covered table and a camp-stool, and, getting out the books used in such matters as blackbirding, he seated himself with his fountain pen and blotter and commenced work signing on Seth Orville's plantation-hands.

As each evil-smelling savage approached him and set down his mark against his name and received six plugs of tobacco as a little present, Hyde knew a sudden impulse to snatch out his guns and start firing hysterically. There was a horrible presentiment in his mind that something was going to happen. It seemed to him sheer madness to bring a ship with only three white aboard into the heart of a savage king's domain. Here was the little *Lizzie R* lying at anchor, hundreds of miles from help, and surrounded by three to four hundred cannibals.

Then, too, the vision of the tomahawk marks on the saloon skylight kept involuntarily recurring to the young man's mind, though he strove time and again to banish the vision. He knew that he was getting afraid again, afraid of the hot eyes that bent so fiercely upon him, of the filed teeth that had bitten into crisp, toasted human flesh, of the sinewy hands that could pluck him limb from limb. He set his teeth and tried to speak in a steady voice, beating down the panic within. He was learning control, and knew that there was a braver, greater courage than physical daring. He was learning the game of bluff the captain had talked about.

The captain was exhibiting it now, as he sat and idly talked with Tiaga, backed by his men, and slouched in a cane chair with apparent contempt for the bronze-skinned, wrinkled old man before him, apparently unaware that under the light banter there ran a vein of deadly seriousness, of vital meaning. Hyde decided then and there that he could never hate the captain again. In place of the deadly, cold anger the fat man had inspired in him there crept in honest respect. He knew, in that moment, that Captain Boggs was a better man than he. Hyde writhed internally to think of what the captain must have thought of him that first day on the *Lizzie R's* poop. No wonder he had said to Seth Orville, "I shall want men," with such contempt in his tone. And while these things were running through the mind of Rodney Hyde, the signing went steadily forward.

IT WAS the drunken mate who was the cause of it all. He turned what would have been an ordinary recruiting venture into something graver. Because he was drunk he made a mistake, and one must pay for mistakes in the Islands. He was herding the savages, seven of them, whom Tiaga had not assigned to be laborers, back to the gap in the wire fence and so to their canoes. The remaining thirteen men he had previously herded down into the shelter-deck of the main hold, where they were to live until the plantations were reached. A seaman stood by the hatch-coaming, to see that the sullen thirteen stayed where they had been put.

One of the party being herded back into the canoes was a slim young man of rather hot temper. He accidentally was pushed against the barbed wire as his compatriots were crowding overside into the canoes and new arrivals crowded up the rail to get aboard, causing some confusion. It may all have been intentional, for there was no effort made on the part of the savages to sort themselves out. A cool-headed man would have straightened the affair. But the mate was drunk.

The youth who had been pushed against the barbed wire rebounded with a frightened yell and stumbled against the mate, who promptly knocked him down and proceeded to kick him viciously. A short, burly native in the thick of the confusion by the rail, catching sight of an opportunity, reached out a great hand and caught the mate a backhand blow across the mouth, knocking him over. The two seamen near by raised their guns but hesitated to fire without orders, as the mate attempted to struggle to his feet, swearing the while and tugging at his holster. The confusion by the rail increased. More canoes surged alongside.

Captain Boggs, not taking his eyes from Tiaga, who was watching him like a cat, rose slowly from his chair and backed a little. He shot a quick glance along the deck, saw what was taking place and, inwardly cursing the mate, called casually—

"What's the matter, Trelawney?"

There was no answer. The mate had risen to his feet, and, swaying dizzily from side to side, he raised his revolver. There was a yelp; it might have been of pleasure. The captain, watching with short swift glances, turned a little gray under his bronze and half-drew his own gun. A spear snickered from nowhere in particular and went into the mate's shoulder. He snapped it off with an oath and commenced to fire at the packed mass before him. Then the mass swayed inboard. No longer did the seven natives attempt to get into their canoes. They turned and led the rush. It swept round the mate and blotted him from view, as it blotted the two seamen standing hesitatingly by.

Captain Boggs sprang to life with an oath and whipped out his gun, and at the same instant, as if he were some young warrior on his first war-path, Tiaga leaped and fastened on him.

The two men went in a staggering, sprawling clinch across the poop, and Tiaga whistled shrilly and long. The captain's shot went wide and plowed a furrow in the deck.

There was a tremendous shouting. Paddles beat the water into foam as the canoes drove in. Weapons were snatched from under their covers and tossed up to those already on deck. Heavy war-clubs battered down the wire barricade in a dozen places, making holes through which men could crawl. The deck grew black with natives, and one minute from the time of the mate's first indiscretion the ship was a battleground and the scuppers were commencing to trickle blood.

From the main-top the two seamen in the vinegar barrel opened fire with the coolness and precision of old veterans. The two men in the bows did the same. The man guarding the savages in the shelter-deck pitched down the hold with a spear in his throat and an arrow in his eye, and the thirteen captives swarmed on to the deck to join in the fight. A flung stone knocked the seaman near the wheel into the water, where a spear thrust from one of the canoes finished him. The captain and Tiaga were still in a pommeling clinch all over the poop.

The mate, by some miracle still alive, fought a way to his feet, sobered and snarling, and having emptied his revolvers was using the butts. Besides the broken spear in his shoulder he had a knife thrust to the hilt in his thigh and two arrows just barely stuck in his ribs. His face was slashed to ribbons and he was drenched with blood. But around him he had a circle of dead. Making a sudden run, he broke clear and reached the poop.

And all through this Hyde sat like a frozen man at his little table, the fountain pen clenched in his right hand, his left fingers spread on the page of the book before him. The naked fear he thought he had conquered swept fold on fold about him. He could not swallow, he could not breathe. His muscles were frozen into inaction, and his brain refused to think. It had all been so sudden. He had been ready for something to happen, or he thought he had. The visions of those two awful minutes while he sat motionless were burned in his brain forever.

The mate, splattering blood everywhere,

lurched against the little table and sent it flying with a crash, the open book skidding across the deck to the scuppers. A fleck of blood fell on Hyde's lips, another on the left breast of his singlet. As if given an electric shock he came to life. With a cry of horror he dropped the fountain pen, and pulling forth a handkerchief wiped the crimson splashes from him. He was still on his stool, his eyes wide and staring. He was going to die, he knew. His imagination swept back full force. He felt the tickle of the tomahawk blade that would cleave his skull, the sear of the knife that would carve his heart. He found the use of his throat and gulped.

The mate stood unswaying with an effort. With shaking fingers he fumbled at his cartridge-belts, and breaking his revolvers loaded them. His eyes were blind with blood, and he did most of the loading by touch, before it occurred to him to brush his eyes with his hand. He was half-snarling, half-sobbing deep in his throat, standing at bay like a lean vulture, torn and mangled but game to the last, because he was cornered.

Having cleared the main deck—the seamen in the bows had been killed by clubs—the savages poured up on the poop to the aid of their chief. The mate lurched forward, kicked at one man's shins as he avoided his spear-thrust and shot him in the face. His wild eyes chanced to rest on the dazed Hyde, not two feet behind and to one side of him, and he spared the time from his few remaining moments of life to sneer. There was no time for more. The next instant he was shooting, and had disappeared under a writhing mass of spear-hafts, arms and sweating bodies. The sound of hot voices was deafening.

It was the sneer that did it. Hyde laughed hysterically as he rose to his feet, knocking over the camp-stool. He suddenly knew that he was not afraid after all. It had been his cursed imagination! What he did now was directed by some instinct, by some courage that welled from within. Perhaps the iron peering from under his skin. A brawny hand swept out and grabbed at his shoulder, drawing him toward another hand that was flung back bearing a shark's-tooth sword. Hyde never knew how his revolvers came to be in his hand, but the feel of them seemed quite familiar. The savage holding him crumpled suddenly backward and let go. Then the blood-hunger swept Hyde like a draft of fiery liquor.

He remembered seeing the mate's body hacked to pieces as the mêlée opened for a moment. He remembered seeing the captain fling the beaten, unconscious Tiaga at his own men, and then, picking up a discarded war-club, his revolvers having been evidently shot empty, back against the side of the saloon skylight and fight like a demon. The short, fat body was tense with effort and drenched with blood. The captain forgot he was fat and remembered only that he was a white man and that he must fight until he dropped. And Hyde, seeing, knew all this and was glad that he was going to die in good company.

Coolness came to him after the savageness of the blood-hunger had passed. He was aware that his hammers were clicking on empty cases and that the snarling mob that had confronted him had broken and fled, except for the ominously still heap of bodies on the deck at his feet. He turned swiftly and ran, bursting through the throng around the captain and getting under the shelter of the great club, where he reloaded his guns.

"Good," grunted the captain, lowering the club as Hyde opened fire and gave him respite.

The savages crumpled and fell back. One or two pitched forward. The others looked round uneasily to see their companions fleeing for the side. With a scared yell they broke and ran, four of them carrying the moaning Tiaga.

It was the two men in the vinegar barrel aloft who turned the trick. Well-nigh beyond the reach of spears, in a position difficult to aim at, they had the advantage over the savages. Their deadly fire told—every shot at such short range; and their supply of cartridges was ample. The slaughter was terrible. And still, with deadly aim and precision, the two seamen picked off the savages as they paddled in desperate haste for the jungle and shelter from the wandering, seeking leaden wasps. The crashing of the undergrowth as the natives scattered in headlong flight could be heard for several minutes.

HYDE leaned wearily against the low skylight and allowed his hot revolvers to slip to the deck. He was breathing hard and was aware that he was fearfully tired. A spear had nipped his thigh, tearing his duck pants and drawing blood. Another spear had grazed his neck, another his temple. A stone had thudded with fearful force against his ribs, leaving a bruise as large as a saucer and winding him for some time. An arrow had scored his arm, and the red blood coated his hand and had made the revolver butt sticky to grasp. But he suffered no vital hurt.

With the captain it was different. His cotton singlet had been well-nigh torn from his body, and about his bare shoulder could be seen, through the drying blood, the marks made by Tiaga's old yellow fangs. There was a fearful gash, perhaps a hole, in the left side of the captain's head from which the blood welled continuously. It had been given by a blow from a stone club, and but for the fact the blow was a glancing one it would have killed him.

As it was, only the man's will power and fierce determination had enabled him to still his shocked brain and remain on his feet. He was wounded in a dozen places besides, wounded from his ankles to his throat. And now that the excitement of the fight was over he collapsed limply, while the crimson blood slowly gathered in a pool on the deck under him.

The startled terns were wheeling in scattered flocks overhead and croaking with fright; the gaudy birds of the foliage were squawking hideously. And the cries of the horribly moaning wounded drowned even the hum of the surf to seaward. The deck was dotted with bodies; the poop was squirming with them. Thirty-eight bullets can do fearful damage at short range. It said much for the savage bravery of the natives that they had stood up so long.

The thing that had been the mate huddled and sprawled half over the open book that Hyde had been writing in. The white pages were now crimson. The little table and the stool were splinters, seen here and there between dark bodies. Astern from the skylight the poop was clean and clear. There had been no fighting thereabouts, except for the clinch between Tiaga and the captain.

Hyde breathed deeply and painfully, every breath meaning a savage twinge from the great bruise in his side. He bent after a while, and, picking up his revolvers, loaded them and slipped them back into his holsters. He had no time now to reason out the philosophy of his actions. He could very clearly see what would have to be done. And as he was the only white man on board who stood on his feet, he would have to do it.

The *Lizzie R* would have to be taken from Ysabel before night, or with the darkness the savages might return. And the schooner would be easy to capture with only three men on board to hold her. But could three men manage to take her to sea? The only white man on board who was capable of working knew nothing of navigation, little of seamanship. Could he do it? Hyde squared his shoulders. It was up to him. He had been passed the buck. He was left entirely to his own resources and he had to make good, not only to satisfy his own soul, but to save his life, and to keep faith with Seth Orville who was, when all was said and done, paying him wages to serve faithfully. The *Lizzie R* was Orville's ship, and he expected everything done to save her.

Hyde walked to the break of the poop, gritting his teeth to keep from giving way to the weakness that assailed him, and called to the two Samoans aloft in the vinegar barrel at the main top. They came down slowly, and, dropping from the sheerpole, made their way to the poop.

Under Hyde's directions they lifted the captain and carried him to the cane chair in which Tiaga had sat, still by the rail. Hyde brought up the medicine-chest from below and gingerly fingered the rows of phials and the bottles of disinfectant. He knew nothing of surgery whatever, and he was half-afraid. But he did his best, washing the captain's wounds in a thin solution of iodin and bandaging them well. He then fixed the fat man up with many cushions and pillows, took a stiff drink of whisky, and set to work to patch himself up as best he could.

He now faced the difficulty of removing the schooner from her dangerous location, and right at the start he ran against what threatened to prove an insurmountable obstacle. Had he understood the Islands better it would never have occurred. But he was green.

He ordered the Samoans to get the decks clear of the dead and to knock out the shackle in the cable. They had gone down on the main deck from sheer force of habit once they had carried the captain to the chair, and now they looked up at the man who was giving them orders and shook their heads. Ignoring him, they commenced to talk together in a low tone, shooting frightened glances at the jungle and at the scene of slaughter round their feet.

Hyde came down from the poop and confronted them. Nothing of the immaculate youth who had come aboard in Apia was apparent now. He was white-faced with loss of blood and spent effort, grim-lipped with determination, as rigid and as implacable in his purpose as all white men who do the right thing at the right moment and write history across the pages of time. The iron was showing stark and clear from under his skin. His hands, resting on his revolver butts, were perfectly steady.

"What's the great idea?" inquired Hyde curtly.

The Samoans grew insolent.

"No good take schooner out. Take whale-boat, we and you. Make ship at sea, or maybe other island. Schooner too big for three men. Fight again byme-by we stop here. You stop here if you like. We go."

So that was it. The men were afraid that they could not handle the schooner. They wanted to take the whale-boat and make a run for safety. No wonder their kind served instead of ruling. It was the easier way out, of course. Hyde had always been taking the easy way all his life. How he had changed! He did not even stop to consider it now. The idea had never even occurred to him.

"Never mind about that," he said, and his voice was hard. "I'm skipper here now. Start pitching those dead bodies overboard."

The Samoans looked at each other. Should they risk their lives with this white fool—the fool they had seen crying in his bunk because the fat captain had struck him? The idea was ridiculous. They would take the whale-boat and go away, away to safety and beautiful Samoa. As if actuated by a single impulse their rifles dropped level with their waists, the lean muzzles covering the white man's heart. They never even gave him a chance to draw his revolvers, and he was yet too green with men to read the warning signs of the eye. There was no mistaking the Samoans' meaning. Hyde cursed them savagely, even as his hands went slowly above his head. He had never thought of the crew breaking out in mutiny. He wondered whether the captain would have guessed it. What would he have done?

The Samoans bound their captive, the teachings of generations preventing them from killing him, and took him up on the poop where they placed him alongside the captain's chair. What their reasons were for this kindness Hyde could never guess, though he had an inkling it was their conscience bidding them give their captive at least the comfort of the poop awnings.

The only obstacle in their way disposed of, the two natives unlashed the whale-boat amidships and by dint of much exertion and many changes of tackle they succeeded in getting it launched through the gap left in the wire fence, though they had to widen it considerably. They hastily provisioned their vessel and confiscated the two water-breakers from the other small boat the schooner carried to supplement the two already in the whale-boat; after which they dropped overboard, hoisted the sail and beat away to seaward against a moderate wind, aided by the tide.

They left the *Lizzie R* still riding at anchor, with two helpless white men on board, in the midst of a savage environment, thronged with savage people, who were sure, sooner or later, to return and wreak vengeance for the fearful toll of their dead. And the decks were dotted with dead. The carrion birds began to drop from the diamond sky, and soon the blood-stained planks walked with loathesomeness.

ABOUT an hour later Captain Sam Boggs woke to consciousness. He opened his eyes and stared for a long while, dazed, up at the poop awning, slashed and ripped here and there by wide-flung spears and wandering shots, letting in hot shafts of light from the burning sun.

The captain was aware that his head ached terribly and that something, probably a broken rib, tickled his lungs when he tried to breathe. The insect hum of the jungle came to him faintly, as did the hum of the far-away surf and the occasional squawks of the gaudy-colored birds fluttering about the foliage ashore. But these lesser noises were blotted out by a nearer, louder sound, a puzzling sound. There were deep-throated croaks, the rustling of dry, harsh feathers, horrible tearing sounds, and the click of talons on woodwork. Then recollection came to the captain.

The mate's indiscretion—the fight with Tiaga—the battle before the saloon skylight with the war-club. He sat up slowly and with effort, noticing that he was well-nigh covered with bandages. He looked along the deck and was very nearly made physically sick by what he saw. The deck was alive with birds feeding off the dead, and in some cases off the not quite dead. A muffled grunt brought the captain's horrified eyes to the deck at the side of his chair, and he swore feebly and with unbounded astonishment. The first thought he had was that Tiaga had taken the ship. Hyde's face looked up, and he spoke.

"Feel well enough to let go these lashings, sir?"

Captain Boggs swore again to relieve his feelings. He struggled off the chair and sat precariously on the edge, lifting his hands to his fevered and bandaged head. He waited a moment, fearing he was going to faint; and then, recovering, he slipped to his knees beside his helpless supercargo and fumbled with the knots that held him. In a few minutes Hyde was free and massaging his wrists, while the great bruise in his side made him aware that it had not disappeared.

He aided the captain back into his chair, and then looked seaward through the glasses for the whale-boat. It was not in sight. Perhaps some canoes from the shore had caught it as it cleared the river-mouth; perhaps it had turned to run along the coast. At all events it could not be seen from the poop of the *Lizzie R*, nor was it ever heard of or seen again.

"What happened?" asked the captain faintly, sinking back on the cushions with a sigh.

Hyde swore. He was learning fast, for his oath was of the deep sea.

"There were only two of the crew left, sir, after the scrap. The kanakas ran just before you went out. I ordered the crew left to clear the decks and get the anchor clear. I was going to try and run her out to sea. But the men refused. They said it was time to take to the whale-boat and leave the schooner. They held me up, tied me and dropped me here. I see they're out of sight now."

"Oh."

The captain closed his eyes wearily. He opened them again as a thought came to him. He even managed a faint smile.

"By the way, Hyde, this is a fine chance for you to tear the face off of me."

The young man started and shot a quick look at the captain. Then he laughed, and, catching the other's right hand, shook it with genuine feeling.

"I was a pup in those days, sir," he said quite frankly. "I don't know that I'm much more now, but I'm trying to be. Now I've got the chance to dig you, as you say, I don't want to. It's funny, but it's true."

The captain essayed a grin, though it was painful for his head.

"I knew you had the makings of a good man in you. Seth said there ought to be something under your skin. There is, Hyde. Your father could see where you were headed for and he sent you out to Seth to save you from yourself. You don't know what was in that letter you brought out? No? I thought not. Well, your dad wanted you licked into shape and Seth turned the job over to me. Don't think too bad of what I did to you. I'm glad I did it now anyway."

"Let's forget it, sir," pleaded Hyde seriously. "I want you to set me right whenever I make a fool of myself in future. I've finished standing on my father's legs. Besides, this is much more exciting."

The captain thought for a moment. He looked along the decks at the beastly sight there, and then at the sullen, silent jungle-walls. Finally he looked back at his supercargo, running his eye over him from head to foot. Hyde waited.

"Do you think you can handle the *Lizzie R* single-handed back to Apia, or until she picks up a ship at sea?"

Hyde laughed easily, caught his breath as his bruise twinged, and a light crept into his eyes that had never been there before. He dropped a reassuring hand on his captain's shoulder.

"Do I think I can? Sir, I *will!*"

"Go to it then," chuckled the captain, a little proud of what he had made. "Go to it, son."

And then, worn out with talking and thinking, he fell into a sleep. Hyde left him for an hour or more while he drove away the carrion birds, pitched the dead overboard and put three not fatally wounded savages into one of the few empty canoes still floating alongside and riding lightly at their heavy anchors of stone. He then drew a few buckets of water and swilled the deck down perfunctorily, keeping an eye lifting the while for any signs of attack. When he had finished he went back to the sleeping captain and regretfully awoke him to ask whether he should get sail up first or knock the shackle from the cable.

Neither man remembered afterward just what happened the following few hours. It was like a nightmare, a strangely distorted vision of the sleep. They grew numb to pain and fatigue. They were mere living machines driven on by something above and beyond them. Hyde kept himself going on whisky; but the captain, because he had no physical labor to do, held himself together by force of will. Luckily there was no further sign of Tiaga and his warriors. In a dim-lighted hut far away, though Boggs never knew it, the chief of the coast tribes of Ysabel was lying still unconscious from the terrible mauling he had received at the hands of the fat man.

Of all rigs of craft the schooner is perhaps the easiest to handle, requiring less men than any other vessel of a like size. But even so, a large three-masted ship like the *Lizzie R* could not be properly managed by only two men. It must have taken Hyde hours to hoist the sails. He did it an inch at a time. He only remembered afterward that when he started the sun was hot, and when he finished the dusk was creeping near. But finally the shackle of the anchor-cable was knocked loose and the chain splashed into the river, lost forever, and the *Lizzie R* beat awkwardly out of the river-mouth and clear of the jungle-fringed shore, one madman at the wheel, and another madman in a cane chair near him. They must have been mad, because they were both laughing hysterically.

* * *

IT WAS two weeks later in Apia. Seth Orville, little, sun-dried and slightly drunk as usual, put down his glass with a bang and took the thin envelope from the native messenger, dismissing him with a wave of his hand.

"Wireless," he grunted in explanation to the gray-haired, burly man with hard, flint eyes who sat opposite him across the marble-topped table in the cool saloon.

Orville opened the envelope, and, straightening the folded paper inside, read with some energy. And then he sat up and snorted.

"Lord bless my soul—waiter, another! Jump, my man! H'm, Billy, this concerns you, about your boy. Listen—the young scamp! Knew there was guts in him—Listen, I say:

"S. S. *Canton*. At sea—

"H'm; she's the Frisco mail boat—

"Captain Sam Boggs requests you be informed that I picked up his ship, the schooner *Lizzie R*—400 miles east Santa Cruz Islands. No one on board but captain and supercargo. Captain severely wounded. Supercargo was working ship. Lent him four men at his request, as he refused salvage. States he was cut off by natives on Ysabel Island. Shall report matter to naval station and proper authorities.—James S. Roberts, master."

William Hyde sat up stiffly in his chair and puffed hard at his cigar. His financial opponents said he was shockless, but they had never seen him with his son. Orville tilted back his atrocity of a sun-helmet, and, thrusting the message he had received into his pocket, rubbed his thin hands together and cackled with unholy laughter.

"That young pup of yours is making good, Billy. Hear that? Supercargo was working ship!"

William Hyde removed his cigar from his lips and slowly smiled. It looked as if two deep clefts had been cut into the rigid flesh of his face. The flint eyes twinkled.

"I knew the boy had a good foundation," he remarked a little proudly. "I hope he's not hurt. I'll start his allowance again as soon as he gets ashore."

"You're about the biggest darn fool I ever knew," snarled Orville as he lifted his refilled glass. "Let him work his own way. ——, you had to. Let him spend your cash when you kick through. Allowance! Huh!"

He tilted the glass.

"Four hundred miles east of Santa Cruz Islands," Orville resumed breathlessly. "Wireless sent this morning. My yacht's in port. Can get position of *Lizzie R* from the *Canton* by wireless. Like to go and meet the pup?"

The other man's voice shook slightly. His eyes were soft. There was little of the magnate about him now. Even Rodney Hyde did not know how much his father thought of him.

"I—I think I'd like to, Seth. He's all I've got, and I'm getting old. I sometimes think I was wrong in——"

"Wrong, bosh! Lis—Listen! Made a man out of him. I know. Qui—Quite right to send him away. Hope Sam licked him well. Bet you S-Sam did anyway. I promised him hundred quid. Well, le's go."

* * *

IT WAS well on in a lazy tropic afternoon when the lookouts at the mast-head of the steam yacht *Tiger* sighted a schooner under full sail bellowing along before a brisk wind. Orville clambered aloft like an inquisitive monkey and peered intently through his favorite telescope.

"That's her," he chirped to William Hyde on the poop below. "That's her—four points starboard the hellum!" he finished with a querulous roar to the bridge.

In an hour the two ships were abreast, and the *Tiger* swung round to lay the same course as the sailing-craft. She surged alongside to within hailing distance and lessened speed. Three white sailors were gathered on the fo'c's'le-head, curiously watching the white-painted yacht that had steamed up from the south to meet them. On the schooner's poop a slim, bronzed figure waved a tattered straw hat excitedly.

The *Lizzie R* came into the wind and hove to, while the yacht dropped a smart gig, and Orville and William Hyde were rapidly transported across the blue waters. They clambered over the low rail.

The oil millionaire was met by the slim young man who had waved from the poop and found himself engulfed in a pair of strong arms. Orville stood by and fussily mopped his brow with his handkerchief. Then he spoke snappily:

"Is this the way you treat your owner when he comes aboard? Call the steward and serve something to drink. Bless my soul, what a mess the deck is in! Where's Sam?"

Hyde the younger looked with a smile, and some affection, at the wrinkled, yellow-skinned man he began to understand at last. He caught Orville's hand and shook it.

"Glad to see you, sir. Captain Boggs is aft, delirious. Went off his head with fever three days back. Will you come on the poop?"

And on the poop they all went, where they saw Sam Boggs lashed to a mattress on a heavy hatch-cover, swathed in bandages and babbling of green fields and old swimming-pools, and of girls he had loved when he had been young and strong and clean. Vastly altered was he. His skin hung in pouches and folds, and the paunch had quite disappeared. Orville snorted as he saw the condition his captain was in, and ordered him sent aboard the yacht. The men who had brought the gig over came aft and lifted the raving man overside and carried him back to the *Tiger*. The yacht then headed away for the south with all the speed of her powerful engines, racing for Apia and the best doctors in the Islands.

On the schooner the young Hyde was proudly showing his father his scars, including the great bruise on his ribs, while Orville looked on and cackled cynically, and grew wistful within as he remembered his own youth. Later there was a description of the fight in the river-mouth as Hyde remembered it, and a briefer description of the long, hard sailing days from Ysabel, before the *Canton* was sighted. Finally, in a subdued voice, a confession that the experience had done him good, made him a better man.

"You must come back to the States with me, son," said the millionaire huskily. "I have a job for a big man on some mining property of mine."

But Rodney Hyde shook his head and turned to Orville, who sat hunched in a cane chair, watching him keenly.

"I'd like to make a few more trips with Captain Boggs, sir, when he's on his feet again. Can I stay as supercargo, Mr. Orville?"

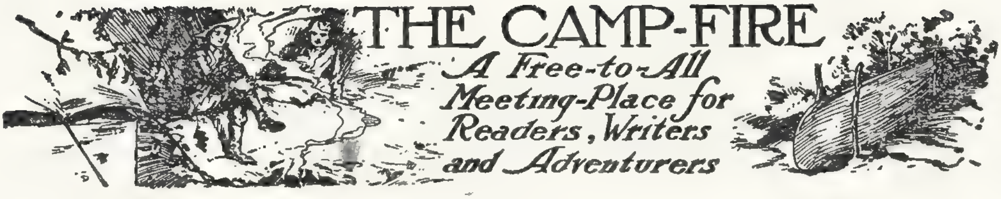
"Can you? I should say you owe me a few months' work. This trip's been a dead loss to me, but you've drawn pay for the whole time! Don't forget that, sir. I'll say you'll stay as supercargo," fumed the little man, but Hyde laughed, for he detected the note of respect under the querulous tone, the note he was hearing for the first time also in his father's voice.

"I'll try the mining properties later, dad," he said, and the older man nodded.

With an apology Hyde left the two and strolled aft to see that the helmsman was keeping to his course, and to bring something from below. William Hyde looked at his old partner and friend and gulped a little! He looked rather foolish for one with such a reputation for hardness.

"I suppose it would be best to let the boy have his own way. But I want him bad. I'd like to thank you, Seth," he concluded softly, but the other waved him away.

"Don't thank me. Thank Sam Boggs and the kanakas of Ysabel, but most the sea and the sky and the old *Lizzie R*." His voice grew almost tender as he eyed the other. "And I haven't forgotten what you did for me in the Klondike, Billy. It'll take a lot to square that." His voice rose querulously, as if he was ashamed of his lapse from his grumbling and ill-humor. "H'm! . . . H'm. When in —— is that pup of yours going to bring on something to drink? This climate never did agree with me—Hyde!"



THE CAMP-FIRE

A Free-to-All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ANY survivors of the Oil Coast in 1882-5 among us? Here's a comrade in the Fiji Islands inquiring; also doing his part as an old-timer adventurer to make our Camp-Fire gatherings still more interesting:

Fiji Times and Herald,
Tuva, Fiji.

Dozens of times I've thought of joining in with the old-timers, but put it off. I've read every *Adventure* since 1912, and have greatly relished the Camp-Fire talks and have considerably widened my knowledge of men and places by reading the chat around the comradely glow.

I CAN not claim much as an adventurer, although the wanderlust gripped me in my younger days. At 14 I left Glasgow and had a wildly exciting time in Portugal. At 18 I sailed for the West Coast of Africa and put in over 2 years as a "Palm Oil Ruffian" in New Calabar and Apabo. When 21 I voyaged in a 900-ton barque to Australia, seeing Kerguelen from the southward. Had all sorts of bush and city life in Australia and have been in Queensland, N. S. Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. Made two small fortunes and lost them again and have been 3 years in Fiji and still going strong. Met many adventurers down here.

Fiji is a very civilized place now. We have modern sewerage, full water supply, electric light, wireless, and expect an inter-island aerial mail service early in 1922. Any white man can walk through any island in Fiji with a gamp for protection—too civilized. The natives are a fine lot of chaps and peaceful and playful as children.

I am publishing with your permission that stirring verse "A Toast to Men!" It's great and makes the blood run warm. Sorry I can't write of any sensational personal stunts, but feel the urge to buck in. Cheerio and good luck.—WM. MCCREADIE.

P. S.—Would be glad to hear of any old-timers of the Oil Coast '82 to '85 if any yet survive.

A FEW words from Max Bonter concerning his story in this issue:

Kent, N. Y.

This tale is real moonshine dope. It is a page ripped right out of the book of life.

I'VE had many a scoop of wine in Mary's Place, and I know all the guys I've written about. *Black Charlie* hasn't been knifed yet, but he'll get it before long if he doesn't watch his step. *McBride* is at present dinging a shovel in a fire-hold on the Lakes and spending his money like the sailor he is. Tony is working on the docks and his attitude toward life has become much more optimistic than it was a few weeks ago when, happening to pause and condole with him a moment, while he was sharpening his stilett' on the wheel of a truck, I heard him impulsively hiss out the desperate man's threat: "I *keel!*"

Mary's man is still in the can, but *Mary's* moonshine profits have attracted a "good-a lawy'" who will undoubtedly get him out. He's sure been a long time dry.

I've eaten huge bowls of spaghetti at the big table in company with *Mary* and her five kids and the old crone with the amber eyes.

So it goes. That's what I mean by digging under the crust. I could never be satisfied putting over second-hand dope.

The steamboaters drift endlessly into Mary's Place—good, clean Americans, many of them, who are willing to do the country's work and take the attendant hazards with a grin, provided they have a little leeway in which to be human. Mostly Jekyll they are, but with a touch of Hyde, like most of the rest of us. Hyde gets restless at times and tries to lift his back off the mat. Then we've got to tussle a while to get a better grip.—MAX BONTER.

ONE of our comrades, who is a district commissioner in West Africa, took exception to data on Gibraltar in a story by Stanley S. Schnetzler. I left the two of them to argue it out, but here's something else from the letter.

Incidentally, while I've been called many things, Captain de la Mothe called me a new one, beginning his letter with "Dear Talli Makilo." Talli makilo, he explained, is Haussa for "white writer." Sounds fine. Am so pleased with my new toy that I leave in his letter a word of praise for our magazine.

Provincial Commission
Coomassie,
Ashanti, W. Africa.

Having finished my "grouse" I'd like to tell you that Ashanti and the Northern territories are two places where elephant are still found. One district commissioner shot seven last year. The license here is 20 pounds whether you kill none or kill plenty.

Besides elephant we have plenty of hippo in the Volta River, and lions in the Northern Territories. Neither elephant nor hippo is in any way protected by law.

Cheerio, it is a great magazine you've got, and I look for it eagerly. I get my mail once in three months, but I've only another 16 months to do till my leave. G. A. DE LA MOTHE,
Capt. King's Liverpool Reg't.,
District Commissioner, Ashanti.

THIS minute I have finished reading "The First Cowboy," in manuscript, just sent in by F. R. Bechdolt.

The Mier Expedition was little more than a name to me, as it was to most of you, I imagine. That is the historians' fault. Most historians are merely mathematicians—without the safety checks imposed upon mathematicians. They find a few events; these events seem to them to add up to a sum equalling some larger event; they write down their little sum and go on to their next mathematical sum, entirely satisfied. The poor fools forget that history is human life. They forget that you can not tell the story of even one human life by telling only a sequence, even a sound sequence, of main actions. What caused the actions? If they go that far, they usually give as causes only material conditions and events. Yes, but what caused these material things?

SOME day there will be a real historian—and he will be real and great because he will ground his beginnings in spiritual, not material, things. I do not mean religious things in the common acceptance of that term, but I mean those things in the soul of man that make him higher than the beast—sometimes better, sometimes worse, than the beast, but higher.

I have not the gift of words to set forth my meaning in crystal clearness. I can only stammer, but you will get my general meaning and do your own thinking. For all I know, the Mier Expedition had practically no material effect upon history as history is ordinarily written. But I say that those deeds could not have been done without bringing into the brains and hearts of men then living certain non-material things that inevitably registered upon their future material actions—*upon history*. Just as earlier unrecorded non-material things put into the men of the Mier Expedition the spirit and point of view that made them do what they did. Just as now, nearly a century later, we read about their deeds and find in ourselves a spirit that was not there before.

I WILL stammer no further. Yet if the professional materialist, that reactionary brake on the progress of human development, strives to account for spiritual causes by citing antecedent material things or events he can in each case be referred a step still further back to spiritual causes for these same material things and events. It is no case of chicken *versus* egg, no question of which was created first. Man is influenced by environment, yes, but down underneath it all you can't get past the everlasting fact that it is something *in* man, something spiritual, that decides—a wish, a will, a hope, whatever you choose to call it. The idea comes before the thing—creates it, changes it, annihilates it, makes it great or small.

When you've read this story of the Mier Expedition I think you'll find something more has happened to you than the reading of a mere story of true adventure. Perhaps, to be specific as to at least one effect upon you, it will enforce the idea that our country was hard earned, a trust handed down to us by stark courage, bitter suffering—by the lives and living of millions dead.

FOR example, suppose you intended some unfaith to your citizenship, a vote cast negligently or worse, an indifference to graft or other unfaith in others, any one of a thousand things. Suppose your imagination were a vivid one and suppose that, in your contemplation, there rose before you the shape of Ewen Cameron—without threat or menace, merely Ewen Cameron with his gray eyes looking at you. Ewen Cameron, merely one of a million who helped build our country, consciously or indirectly, with his heart's fire and his heart's blood. And could you look him in the eyes?

Poppycock? Ah yes. The same kind of poppycock that sent our boys to France and that has sent millions of millions of other humans to the making of history. The draft, economic conditions, international diplomacy? To be sure, but quite a few went altogether for other reasons, and these other reasons did more than anything else to send, indirectly, the others—and to *make* the draft, economic conditions and international diplomacy. The historian usually forgets to look into the heart. And in the heart are the beginnings of all things.

THE lost Adams mine once again. Some data from one in position to know the scant facts:

Sacramento, California.

Seeing in the Jan. 10th issue some letters regarding the lost Adams mine, I was in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico in 1873, also hunting for the lost Adams mine or it might have been the Peters mine. In '61 my father, with his partner John Peters, joined a pack train going east from California, when they came to the western part of Colorado. John Peters left the pack train, turned south close to the line of New Mexico, turned east and, in following a small creek, he came to a water-fall about 10 feet high. Panning in the gravel at the foot of the waterfall he panned out about $2,000 in 6 or 7 days. He was alone and the Indians were bad. He started east and came to Independence, Mo., about the same time the pack train did. John Peters got four men to go with him back to where he found the gold. That was the last of the party that went with John Peters. My father thought the Indians killed him. That was what took me into the country to find the lost Peters mine. The Adams mine might have been the same one.—R. A. LEROY.

WHO is this J. B. King? Here's a call for him. Is he among us?

Calgary, Alberta.

Did any of the readers ever see the name J. B. King written on a freight car without removing the chalk? Perhaps some of you can tell me who he was. I never see the name now, but I used to see it before the war.

I see there is no Camp-Fire station in this town. If I was in a position to start a Station here I most certainly would. How about some of the pals in this town?—F. A. SWIMM, 2007 2nd St. West.

SOMETHING from Hugh Pendexter as to the historical material used in his serial beginning in this issue:

Norway, Maine.

Many of the characters in "Tameless Days" were real. Among the fiction characters are the *Contents*, *Old Misery*, the *Wild Cat*, *Baldy* and the *Fellows* brothers; also *Griscom* and *Sessions*, the preacher. But there was a Methodist preacher at Bannack at the time of the story.

THE shooting of a man in a barber's chair without disturbing the trade is vouched for by Prof. Thomas Dimsdale. He is the authority quoted by Bancroft ("Popular Tribunals") to the effect that the Magruder party was murdered by order of Plummer and that Erastus (Red) Yeager (also spelled Yager) named Plummer as chief of the band, with William Bunton second in command; also that Skinner was roadster, fence and spy. Many prominent members of the band I have not mentioned, such as Jake Silvie, who had killed twelve men, Mexican Frank, etc. I have used Red Yeager's confession in establishing the identity of Plummer as chief of the gang, although a contributor to the Historical Society of Montana says Ives, just before execution, "amazed the citizens by saying Plummer was the chief." Bancroft says Ives was hung thirty minutes after sentence was pronounced. In Leeson's "History of Montana," a most comprehensive survey of the early settlements, it is stated Ives was hung fifty-eight minutes after sentence was pronounced. The same authority says Thomas C. Caldwell and William A. Rumsey, drivers for the Oliver Salt Lake stage line, had a share in the business, also that the Rattlesnake ranch was known as Bunton & Company's ranch, with Red Yeager handling the bar-trade.

I HAVE taken a liberty, perhaps, in having A. M. Holter in Virginia City in September, 1863. In Bancroft's biography of him it's stated he was there in 1864. But according to W. Y. Pemberton in his interesting contribution to the Historical Society of Mont., Vol. 8, Holter arrived with his mill late in '63 and his first introduction to the country was to be held up and robbed by Ives. He escaped being killed only by his dodging around his team of horses and running for it. The story of the Bannack City man (name in story fictitious) refusing $600 gold for eighty feet, is true. John W. Clampitt, in an article, *Harper's* Aug. '91, says Plummer and his deputies, Stinson and Ray, were hanged on a Sunday morning from a gallows erected by Plummer himself.

I had much trouble with the spelling of Biven's Gulch. There seemed to be about equal authority for the form I have used and for "Bevin's."

Bancroft in his Hist. Mont. p. 640, states in part: "Soon after the execution of Ives, five citizens of Virginia City and one of Nevada City found each other taking steps in the direction of such a committee (Vigilance)." The same authority in his "Popular Tribunals" states (p. 677) that the first Vigilance Committee was formed on the night that Ibalt's body was brought to Nevada City, or prior to Ives's death. I think the first statement quoted is correct. In the Clampitt article, mentioned above, it's stated that five men from Nevada City and one from Virginia (reverses Bancroft), formed the committee the day following the Ives execution. In the Pemberton article it is also positively stated that Ives was not tried by the Vigilance Committee. Mr. Pemberton was one of the two men selected to take down the evidence presented at the trial.

SILVERTHORNE, the "first miner in the Rockies," and Ned Williamson, wintered in the Bitterroot Valley the Winter of 1862-63. J. M. Carlton, who ran the Virginia Hotel, was born in Maine and went to Bannack in '62, removing to Virginia City the following year. Nicholas Kessler, who ran a bakery and saloon in V. C. for a few months in the Summer of '63, and who afterward became a prominent citizen of the territory, was in the Pike's Peak rush in '60 and followed mining till, going to V. C., Daniel H. Weston, agent for shoe-dealers, arrived in Bannack June 3, '63. Samuel T. Hauser, mentioned in the story, came up the Missouri in '62, prospected to heads of Columbia River and went to the Bannack mines in the Fall of that year. In '65, with Colonel Sanders, he opened a bank at Virginia City, and later organized several banks, mining companies and was prominent in developing railroads.

Four of the five men arrested in V. C. in January, 1864, were rounded up in various gambling houses, and Clubfoot George was captured in Dance & Stuart's store. When Bill Bunton was hanged he asked for a mountain "three hundred feet high to jump off of," complaining the platform was too low. Skinner broke away from his captors in hope of being shot to death. He was disappointed.

THE incident of the Spaniard's death is taken from the murder of George W. Coply by Spaniard Frank in Bannack in the late Fall of '63. Bancroft quotes a contemporary resident to the effect that a mob tore down the house he was barricaded in, set the wreckage afire and threw him into it. Leeson says he was killed by being dragged through the street with a noose around his neck. The house belonged to Plummer and was frequently occupied by Buck Stinson, one of his deputies. Billy Page "squealed" on his pals, the Magruder murderers. Hill Beachy spent $6,244 in capturing the four men in San Francisco and the Idaho legislature authorized the repayment to him of this sum.

The first Masonic meeting in Montana was held in the Winter of 1862-3 in a small log cabin at Bannack, in the rear of Jack Oliver's express office. Those present got a dispensation from the Grand Lodge of Nebraska, but the charter was not granted, according to Leeson, until 1871. Coply (also spelled Copely), who was killed by Spaniard Frank, was one of those present at the first meeting.

After the Plummer gang was exterminated other offenders were executed. John Keene was the first man hanged in Helena. He murdered Henry Slater. An old pine, a few rods south of Helena and where the stage road crossed Dry gulch, served as the gallows for him and several others.—PENDEXTER.

THE story was not printed in our magazine. I've an idea it's one I've heard of before and have wanted to get hold of to see whether it uses an idea I'd like to see tried in a story.

Calgary, Alberta.

Now here is a question for some of the Camp-Fire boys to answer. Is it possible for a man to smoke opium and by not inhaling it keep from being doped and from getting the habit?

At one time I read one installment of a story called "Cap. Silence." I do not know if it was in *Adventure* or not. Can you tell me?—FRANKLIN A. SWIMM.

YOU who are already aroused over the ever increasing measures for suppression of free speech, and you, too, who with good or evil intent are under various pretexts giving your efforts in aid of such suppression, read the following from the *Literary Digest* of August 19, 1922. And, summoning all pretexts, expediencies and evasions, answer it if you can.

A Document on "Liberty"—"A model of kindly and devastating criticism" is what the New York *World* calls an editorial in the Emporia *Gazette*. It is perhaps the last word of Mr. William Allen White to his friend, Governor Allen, over the recent controversy that brought Mr. White under orders from the Industrial Court of Kansas. The *World* would give it "a place among historic public documents," and as such, without concerning ourselves further with the questions that brought it forth, we give it to our readers:

"TO AN ANXIOUS FRIEND:

"You tell me that law is above freedom of utterance. And I reply that you can have no wise laws nor free enforcement of wise laws unless there is free expression of the wisdom of the people—and, alas, their folly with it. But if there is freedom, folly will die of its own poison, and the wisdom will survive. That is the history of the race. It is the proof of man's kinship with God. You say that freedom of utterance is not for time of stress, and I reply with the sad truth that only in time of stress is freedom of utterance in danger. No one questions it in calm days, because it is not needed. And the reverse is true also; only when free utterance is suppress is it needed, and when it is needed, it is most vital to justice. Peace is good. But if you are interested in peace through force and without free discussion, that is to say, free utterance decently and in order—your interest in justice is slight. And peace without justice is tyranny, no matter how you may sugar-coat it with expediency. This State to-day is in more danger from suppression than from violence, because in the end, suppression leads to violence. Violence, indeed, is the child of suppression. Whoever pleads for justice helps to keep the peace; and whoever tramples upon the plea for justice, temperately made in the name of peace, only outrages peace and kills something fine in the heart of man which God put there when we got our manhood. When that is killed, brute meets brute on each side of the line.

"So, dear friend, put fear out of your heart. This nation will survive, this State will prosper, the orderly business of life will go forward if only men can speak in whatever way given them to utter what their hearts hold—by voice, by posted card, by letter or by press. Reason never has failed men. Only force and repression have made the wrecks in the world."

SOMETHING from J. D. Newsom in connection with his story in this issue:

Salisbury, England.

I wish some more influential writer, some really big gun, would expose the system of indentured labor as practised in the Pacific. It's a barbarous, bestial thing which exists only because it's unknown.

The penitentiary, the "*bagne,*" has ceased to function in New Caledonia, but the poor devils who have survived are ghastly wrecks. They can't leave the island, they can't get work (they are too old for work) and—well, you should see the lunatic asylum! And it is only right to add that many of the "broken men" out there were sent out for really minor offences of a political or military nature—insubordination to a superior officer and that sort of thing.

One such penitentiary still flourishes on the American continent and when I can scrape enough money together I am going down there. It should be worthy of a write-up.—J. D. Newsom.

AT OUR August 20, Camp-Fire Id. Card No. 12616 said that while a canoe trip might be made down the Mississippi River from Bemidji, Minn., Brainerd, Grand Rapids or Mississippi Landing would be much nearer to the "Father of Waters"—that if a man can "put in" the Mississippi at Bemidji it is something the oldest inhabitants never found out. Here are two letters in reply:

Ely, Minn.

Noticed in the August 20, issue that some one doubts the statement that it is possible to canoe from Bemidji to New Orleans on the Mississippi River.

If I may be permitted to "horn in" I'd say that it *is* possible. In fact it's possible to canoe from the true source, Lake Itasca, clear through to the mouth.

From Lake Itasca the river flows northward into Lake Bemidji thence eastward through Cass Lake and Lake Winnibegoshish and finally turning south. From the last lake the course is easily traced, on any map.

However, should anyone be inspired with the happy thought to make the complete length of the river, would say that I don't consider the trip from Lake Itasca to Lake Bemidji worth while. The river is little more than a creek for quite a way, and settlers and homesteaders have obstructed the course with footbridges. Scenery is nothing rare and altogether I don't consider the time well spent.

I hope my corrections will be taken without hard feeling. I fell that I can say something with surety as I've spent two field sessions at the Minnesota Forest School camp in Itasca State Park which included Lake Itasca and the source of the Mississippi within its boundaries I've seen a little of the country and even contemplated such a trip as is spoken of.

Before I quit I'll say that in the morning I'm off on a three week trip in canoes along the boundary waters in Lake County, Minnesota and, should anyone feel the call to canoe, Ely is the place to come. Can outfit for a fair price and Winton, the jumping-off place, is three miles out—Come on—E. E. Probstfield, ——

Duluth, Minnesota.

Referring to the very interesting letter of No. 12616 in Camp-Fire of August 20th number, he is in error regarding Bemidji, Minnesota, location with relation to the Mississippi River.

Bemidji is on Lake Bemidji, which receives the water of Lake Itasca, the "true head" of the Mississippi and passes it on to Cass Lake, then to Lake Winnibegoshish, and Ball Club Lake, from whence the river takes its long and interesting course to the sea.—G. R.

DIAMONDS in North America—this comrade in Australia tells us they've never been found in paying quantities north of the equator.

Newcastle, N. S. W.,
Australia.

I read with interest comrade L. Patrick Greene's article about the discovery of the Cullinan diamond. The following story may be of interest to Camp-Fire as to diamonds.

IN 1905-6 I was prospecting and working in the Goldfields of Southern Nevada. I had a partner by the name of James Cooney, a son of Mr. Cooney senior, who made the first favorable report on the property where the Cullinan diamond was afterward found. Mr. Cooney was Irish by birth and an expert or metallurgist of many years standing in many mining camps of the western hemisphere, finally going to the diamond fields of South Africa, being employed at the De Beers mines for eight years. Afterward became superintendent of the Boer Mint at Pretoria, Transvaal, until that city was captured by the British army during the Boer War. Having agreed to remain in charge of the bullion, etc., belonging to the Transvaal Government and being Irish, he naturally did not care a great deal about the English, consequently the British powers had to use severe means to compel Mr. Cooney to divulge where the gold in his care was. According to what his son told me they even took all his private fortune even to his gold watch, the case of which was composed of gold he had collected in different parts of the world and in its natural colors. (Gold in its native state varies in color from a silver white to the color of jewelry gold).

MR. COONEY returned to the U. S. A. to start over again and try and regain his lost fortune. Arriving in Goldfields, Nevada, he built the Rotunda Hotel, which was known locally as Cooney's Folly, as it was made in a peculiar style and never paid. Whenever a desert rat so called, or prospector, came to town Mr. Cooney showed him specimens of blue ground, yellow ground, etc., in which diamonds are found in South Africa asking them if they had found anything like it, but as few prospectors know much about precious stone prospecting, very little attention was paid to him. It is a strange but true fact that diamonds in paying quantities have never been found north of the equator, although single specimens have been found all the way from Alaska to Arizona.

Mr. Cooney finally heard of diamonds having been found near Oroville, California, in the early days of placer mining. Leaving Goldfield for there, Mr. Cooney prospected the ground and found what is known in mining parlance as a diamond pipe similar to the pipes of the DeBeers, Premier and other mines. Interesting Eastern and Western capitalists in the venture, they organized the U. S. Diamond Mining Co. and started sinking a three-compartment shaft 12 x 4 feet in the clear, imported diamond-washing machines, etc. Diamonds, sapphires and other precious stones were found which cut fancy, the trade name for A-1 diamonds. However the rule mentioned above held good and sufficient stones were not forthcoming to warrant further work. At present the property is in charge of a watchman who finds a stone occasionally.

I bought stock in the company, but have never realized any dividends. As to Mr. Cooney or his son, I have no idea where they are at present.—Ernest K. Irving.

ONE of you hopped on us because in one of our stories the author used "bridle" when he should have used "headstall"—a story, I believe, of the Northwest Mounted, his claim being simply that this was the word current with the Mounties. Now here's an old horseman who says headstall and bridle are not the same at all:

Trenton, New Jersey.

I have seen your note about bridle and headstall. A bridle is used for controling a horse when he is being driven and ridden. It may be of the open class or have blinders which are used for horses who are nearsighted or, as a horseman would say, to prevent him from shying.

A headstall is a slang word for halter used by people who do not know the proper name for harness of that particular class. Stall-collar is a strap which is put around a horse's neck when he has the habit of breaking loose at night. Used just as you would put one on a dog. Headstall is naturally the last stall at the head of stables where you can hang your bridle.

I have had 18 years with English thoroughbred, racing, fox-hunting and polo ponies with several years in the harness stables as coachman with two men under me taking care of nine horses.

I have traveled all over the British Isles also other parts of Europe with horses, having been with such families as the Duke of Buccleuch, Lord Dalmer, Sir John Hume Campbell also Sir James Miller, J. Marderson, Sir Henry Trotter, Sir R. Usher, and of few more I need not mention. I think I ought to know a little about this, hence the reason for my writing to you. Mistakes are easily made but it is hard when some one picks you up before you fall.—William Brown.

WHEN the old-timers give us a first-hand talk about the old West I know I speak for all of us in stating our very particular appreciation:

Fort Stockton, Texas.

I have just read in the August 30, 1922, issue the story by Mr. Bechdolt, "The Law Bringers." It is a well written story and I think it is pretty accurate in detail although there is a good deal of the story about which I have no special information. I am writing you a few items within my personal knowledge which will add a little to the side lines of the story. The life of Billy the Kid is an epic in the Southwest and even such trivial details as I am about to give will hardly be considered irrelevant.

IN 1879, I was one of a party of six who left Dallas, Texas, intending to go by horseback over the Staked Plains and on up to Leadville, Colo. The other members of the party were N. B. Laughlin, afterward one of the judges of the Supreme Court of New Mexico; James Martin, an ex-Confederate soldier; N. J. W. Fish, a nephew of Nathaniel J. Wyeth, one of the heroes in Irving's story of Captain Bonneville, and who was later the mayor of Taunton, Mass.; G. W. Irving, afterward an engineer on construction of some railroad in Nebraska; and J. W. Bell. Of the six, three are now dead, Martin having died near Santa Fé, N. M., Irving at some place in Nebraska, and J. W. Bell at Lincoln, N. M., in 1881, at the hands of Billy the Kid.

At Tascosa in the Panhandle of Texas we came to our first house after 250 miles of uninhabited territory. It was a small place of two stores, two saloons, a post-office and a residence of a Mexican freighter named Casimero Romero. Here we were deflected from our intended route by news of a "strike" in New Mexico, and set our course for Carbonateville, a mining-camp situated in the Cerrillos 25 miles south of Santa Fé. As we had passed through a long stretch of country without inhabitants other than Indians, the party was heavily armed.

WHEN we came into Anton Chico, a small town on the Pecos River in New Mexico, we noticed that the Mexican inhabitants watched our movements very closely, but seemed to be quite shy of us. We laid up at this place for a day in order to rest our saddle and wagon animals. From a Jewish merchant in the place we learned that the Mexicans believed us to be a part of a band of outlaws which had been operating further down on the river, and, as we had heard some remarks by Mexicans in which the words "*Tejanos diablos*" figured, we had no reason to doubt this information. He further told us that, as the outlaws with whom we were supposed to be connected had committed depredations in that vicinity, it was planned by the natives to make an attack on us.

So we stood guard at our camp by day and night until we left. However no actual attack was made on us, due I suppose to the explanations which the Jewish merchant helped us to make to the people of the town. I am not certain at this time whether or not we heard the name of Billy the Kid mentioned, but it is probable that we did, as he had already earned a reputation in that country although we had not heard of it. I do remember, however, that the gang with whom we were supposed to be associated was connected in some way with a cattle war and with stealing stock.

WHEN our party arrived at Carbonateville it was disbanded. Mr. Laughlin started in the practise of law at Santa Fé; Jim Martin hunted him a job of some kind; Fish and Irving bought 5,000 head of Mexican sheep which they shipped later to Kansas City, while Bell and I bought or traded for a mining prospect. On the breaking out of the Ute war in August or September I went north, and, later in the Fall, returned to Dallas, while Bell remained during the Winter in charge of work on our mining prospect. This mine did not develop satisfactorily so sometime in the Spring of 1880, he left this work and drifted into some other employment. Later I heard that he had become a Deputy United States Marshal, and it may be that he was serving in that capacity when killed by the Kid.

He had been a clerk in a grocery store in Dallas, Texas, situated at the corner of the courthouse square, next to the bridge over the Trinity River. I think he had an uncle of the same name who was one of the proprietors of the store, but, as I had never met him before starting on the trip to Santa Fé in 1879, I knew nothing about his people or his former career other than this. He was a tall, slender man, quick and active in movement, quiet and unassuming in deportment, not given to drinking, and was not the kind of man who would have developed into a bully or killer. He was unmarried and about twenty-eight or thirty years old.

IN THE Spring of 1880, I left Dallas and staged it overland to the town of Shakespeare in southern New Mexico about three miles south of the present town of Lordsburg. From this point as a headquarters I engaged in the business of prospecting for minerals in southern New Mexico during the remainder of that year. I think it was in June that a party of five of us were engaged in prospecting in the San Andreas mountains north of Las Cruces, N. M. The Apaches were troublesome and dangerous so we were heavily armed. Not finding anything which pleased us in the San Andreas mountains, we moved east across the wide valley and over the Mal Pais to the western foothills of the Sacramento Mountains. About one or two o'clock one afternoon we came to the little Mexican town of Tularosa and learned that there was an American store just a short distance from the northern part of the town.

We hunted it up and found the store with quite a good sized corral back of it and a residence on one side. The clerk was a rather good-looking man, either Irish or Scotch, and his wife seemed also to be in the employ of the firm, probably as cook. I do not remember his name, which I find is given by Mr. Bechdolt as "Nesbeth." After a short time Pat Coghlin, the proprietor, and his wife came into the store. He was a tall, rather fine looking red-faced man of about fifty, I should think, who spoke with a noticeable Irish brogue. He and his wife were very courteous and apparently anxious to make things as pleasant for us as possible. We were offered the freedom of the corral, food for the horses and meals at the house and this hospitality was very strongly wished on us.

I DO not remember what brought it about, but we were distrustful somehow of this hospitality, although at that time we had heard nothing about Pat Coghlin. After making a purchase or two we rode on some miles and made our camp on the Tularosa road not far from the creek. Here we remained during the next day, prospecting in the hills near our camp but not venturing very far away. At dinner time a man on horseback came into our camp and of course was invited to eat with us. He seemed to be quite inquisitive about our business; where we had come from and where we were going; and particularly he wanted to know how and where we had gotten a certain horse which was branded "C" on the neck and was plainly a cavalry horse. This horse had come to us in the San Andreas Mountains several days before that time at a point where the soldiers and Indians had had a fight about two weeks before we got there. We had used it since then as a pack-horse. It was a big, fine bay horse, worth in those days from $150 to $200. Our visitor told us that we could get $30 reward from the Government by turning this horse in at an Army post. He proposed to pay us $25 of that reward if we would turn the horse over to him so that he could carry it up to Fort Stanton to get the full reward. We accepted this proposition, but having learned a little later of Coghlin's reputation, we became suspicious that the man had been sent to us by Coghlin and that that horse never got back afterward to any Army post.

AFTER a day or two at this place we started back toward Las Cruces and, having fallen in with some fellow travelers, we began to hear a good deal about Mr. Coghlin. Among other things we heard that on the morning of the very day that we had come to his store he had hitched up his buggy animals and had started from Tularosa on the road to Las Cruces. Later that morning he came back bareback on one of his animals and claimed that about ten miles out of town near where a little stream crossed the road, he had been fired on from ambush, that one of his horses was killed, and that he had gotten away only after hurriedly cutting loose the other animal and riding it bareback out of the range of his hidden enemies. Now we had come into his store probably two or three hours after his return but for some reason he had not told us of this incident. So we were disposed to believe that this display of hospitality was due to an appreciation of the strength that would be given to his situation by the camping of five well armed men on his premises.

IN THE Spring of the year 1881 I became assistant postmaster at Silver City, N. M. I learned from the old-timers there that Billy the Kid at one time had been an undesirable resident of that town. It was said that he was about sixteen years of age when he left the place; that he was small for his age; was addicted to petty thieving, and was considered very cowardly. The immediate occasion of his leaving the town was an arrest for some small theft and his imprisonment in the town jail, which then consisted of a log house with a wooden chimney. During the night he succeeded in crawling up through this chimney, and so he got away. The next heard of him by the inhabitants was to the effect that he was employed in some capacity in a saloon in Globe, Arizona, and later on it was said that he made his first killing at that place.

The people at Silver City said that his mother was married to a man named Antrim; that she and Antrim had come originally from Brooklyn, N. Y., and it seemed to be the understanding there that the boy had been born in Brooklyn. This last statement however was of course subject to considerable doubt. I saw Antrim several times while I was in that office. He was said to live out from Silver City toward the Mogollon Mountains and only came in occasionally for his mail. I left Silver City in 1882, and I do not know what became of Antrim and wife subsequently.

SOMETIME about 1884 or 1885, I met Pat Coghlin in Austin, Texas, where he was stopping at the same hotel on Congress Avenue where I had also registered. He told me that the people in New Mexico were getting too tough for him; that the outlaws were running the country; that the life of a man with any money in that country was almost worthless because some desperado would kill him for what money he could get from him; so he had been compelled to leave there. He also told me that he and his wife were going back to Ireland and I think he said that they intended to remain there. As well as I remember, he or his wife had at one time lived in Texas, and they were visiting friends and relatives before going back to the old country. I never heard of any further movements of this couple after that time.—O. W. WILLIAMS.

THE origin of our American Indians is always an interesting subject:

Magalia, California.

I noticed in the Sept. 3 issue a letter by Mr. W. Hackney commenting upon the probable origin of the American Indian. He said a lot when he said it was a good subject for discussion, as no one can say positively where they came from and it can be argued upon with impunity.

I don't claim the least authority upon the subject but every one interested has his own viewpoint. Here is mine:

WHY, necessarily, would the Indians have to have immigrated from any country?

The Bible says there was a Garden of Eden, and in it were Adam and Eve. They had two sons: Cain and Abel. Cain killed Abel in some quarrel and then went to the land of "Nod" and brought back a wife. If this is true there were other people upon earth at that time. Do you see? Well, why not Indians as well as "Nodlanders," or why not at a later period a second Garden from whence the Indians came? If so, it could have been on this side of the Atlantic as well as over there.

ON THE other hand, pyramids and temples have been found in Mexico which revert to the ancient Egyptians in a good many ways. This might mean that the Indians came from Egypt. Another thing is that the features of the Indian are somewhat like the Mongolians. In a sun temple in Yucatan various relics have been unearthed which correspond with Chinese implements of an earlier stage.

The Indians could not very well be both of Egypt and China at the same time. And why isn't there any legend from the Indians to that effect, if this is the case?

Of course it's possible, though not likely, that they went from Egypt and then to China, thence to America *via* Alaska. There's another outlet to conjure on!

My opinion can be taken for what it is worth. About 10c I suppose. However, remember this—I didn't claim any authority upon the subject. That is my alibi.

Well, let's hear some more opinions right away.—K. W. MASON.

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TWO letters concerning the notorious Bender family who made a business of murdering guests who stayed for the night:

Bentonville, Arkansas.

If it is allowed for a stranger to the Fire, although I have been with you in the spirit, I would like to express my opinion in regards the Bender family of Kansas. I was born in Elgin, Kansas, that little old cattle town on the line between Oklahoma and Kansas which was until a few years one of the last places in the Old West, where the real old-timers used to drive cattle up from Oklahoma and parts of Texas to ship from and I can remember the big doings that used to go on there.

My grandparents on both sides were pioneers in Kansas and I have heard the Bender tale all my life. In fact, the father of one of my aunts was killed by these people and it was her mother's heroism that helped put them out of business.

IN THOSE early days all the travel was by wagon or horseback and news was very slow to travel, so under those conditions the Bender family got along very well. They were of a low class of German or Dutch people (I have heard them called always Dutch and as there was no distinction between them in those days I presume they were German—I haven't got over the war yet; was with the Canadians) and ran a road house between Oswego and Cherryvale—closer to Cherryvale, I believe. Since all the travel was by wagons or horseback of course lots of people stopped at these kind of places, and especially strangers were their best customers and as there were no banks every one carried their money with them.

D. York was the first who got suspicious of them when his brother failed to show up after being seen on the other side of their place before night fall but I really believe my aunt's mother was the one who scared them into leaving in such a hurry without destroying all the evidence.

HER husband had been away on a business trip and when he didn't come at the appointed time she got worried (knowing that he had quite a bit of money for those times on him) and saddled up a horse and started out to find him, which was quite a job in those days, as it was over a hundred miles to the Benders' and she had to go quite a ways on the other side. (They grew women as well as men those days.) She went to the other side of Benders' and found traces of him and found out that he was to stop there on the night he was last seen. Night was overtaking her here and she was about to stop at the tavern, had even had her horse fed, when something warned her in their action so she decided to leave. Everything smelled bad around there, so she left in a hurry. They tried to catch her, but she got away. Her questions must have scared them, for the next day when D. York's party came the place was deserted.

As soon as D. York stepped in the door he said he smelled blood and a little looking around cleared everything up. The bodies they found buried in a flowered field close to the house.

The horses soon caught up to them, but what was ever done to them will never be known, as each member of the posse was sworn to secrecy and so far none have broken it. There are only one or two left to be seen if they break it.

So another chapter was written of the pioneer days of Kansas. G. Polson.

P. S. The method of killing was as described by J. Paul Allen's letter, some say by Kate or the old man, but most say Kate.

Anyway when a small boy by learning this tale so much I really was afraid to go anywhere for fear it would be another Bender.—G. Polson.

Corinth, Mississippi.

J. Paul Mills mentions the Benders of Kansas. Their place was between Cherryvale and Parsons, nearer Cherryvale, I passed by the place or within a mile of it a couple of times, and my father pointed out the place to me. Was a few hours drive from where I was raised. Neighbors had become suspicious of them and, as I remember, the first real evidence was a horse or team that was left to wander about. The Benders suddenly and miraculously disappeared. They were hunted for months. Not until I was grown did I find out they had not been permitted to leave the country. I was not told but have always thought they were knocked in the head. Kate was the real fiendish one, and showed more fight than the rest. They were father, mother, Kate and John. It was before Kansas had prohibition, and of course they sold the liquor and it enticed many travelers to stop.

The bodies were interred near the banks of a creek, and years afterward were washed out. Of course very few ever found out the end of the notorious Bender family.—Mrs. Ida R. Berry.

SOMETHING in connection with his story in this issue. Personally I'd hesitate a bit to join his "campaign" to educate fathers. Always seemed to me that the effect of wealth on the second generation was a useful factor working for redistribution of large fortunes. If a man becomes a millionaire and lets his children grow up as useless spendthrifts and empty-heads they are pretty likely to dissipate that fortune in whole or large part. If they don't, their children are likely to. Survival of the fittest stuff. That's only one phase of the matter and a cure that does not by any means apply in all cases, but when I see one of these semi-decayed parasites that thought always brings me a grain of comfort.

Eureka, California.

Too often it is the custom to speak of the idle sons of the rich with a sneer of contempt. Doubtless there is a small minority who deserve only that recognition. But it has always seemed to me that it is the parents' fault if their children turn out to be otherwise than useful citizens. The parents who object to their children joining in the dust and din of industrialism, because it is lowering (Lord only knows why), and thereby force them out of the grim but sometimes joyous fight for life, are making a big mistake. It is unjust, though, to blame the children. The young man who has nothing else to do is forced to learn how to change his clothes four times a day, to hand out tea at afternoon hen-parties, and to keep well posted on the latest divorce scandal and ultra-modern dances. He has to do something to pass each twenty-four hours away.

I WROTE "Under the Skin" with the idea back of my mind that all the young rich fellows need is a chance for action, a chance to show what they're made of. "Degenerates" Germany called that idle class both in Britain and America. But when the chance came the young fellows showed different. They went out from their easy pathways and sheltered nooks and beat the finest troops in the world for organization and equipment. Many a British "loot" polished his monocle before going into action. Many an American "shavetail," I don't doubt, anointed his hair before the advance. Degenerates? Ask the blighters who signed at Versailles.

So it comes to the fact that the young rich fellow is sound underneath. If his father's been too darned deep in business to lick him into shape, that's not his fault. Give him a chance to show what he's made of and he'll surprize the world. Don't you think so? It's worth remembering, anyway, when one sees the young fellows speed by in their imported cars. It's probably been their daddies' fault. Wouldn't it be a good idea to start a campaign to educate fathers? What say?—A. R. Wetjen.

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These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules**, thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

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While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

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Missing Friends or Relatives

(See next issue)

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(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service (except our assaying and oil services) free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1, 2. The Sea. In Two Parts
3, 4. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
5, 6. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
7. Australia and Tasmania
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Mountains and Mountaineering
Standing Information
Lost Trails

Around the World in a Little Ship

HOW others did it:

Question:—"Permit me to ask you a few questions about sailing around the world in a small-size vessel such as Mr. Joshua Slocum did in his *Spray.*

You no doubt have heard of the above-mentioned man and vessel. Now the problem that stares me in the face is money—money—money! As I understand it, he (Slocum) did this thing without capital. Also a Britisher—Thos. Drake—in his boat of thirty-two feet, the *Sir Francis,* sailed from Seattle around to the Atlantic side and is still on his way as far as I know. Drake is making his expenses selling marine curios. Another, Ralph Stock, in his

Dream left England for the South Seas (see *National Geographic Magazine* for January, 1921). He too had but very little working capital.

Now in view of the above facts each one claims to have got by, lived on the fat of the sea (or land) and each lived to tell the tale. Can I, without capital, gather enough fish, turtles, etc., to keep my ribs at their proper distances apart? I will have to pay for a boat, of course; but after that what? What islands and places would you advise so that one can forage, or obtain food otherwise?

Can you tell me if the consuls in foreign countries will supply food to one who has no money to pay for same? I believe that captains of steamers will do so without a monetary reward. But one must not depend on this alone. I want to earn what I get.

Now as you have been around this globe a bit you might suggest how one should include in his itinerary the places of interest and where one can obtain food for nothing—I mean such stuff as coconuts, ducks (as they are in some lagoons in Mexico) where there is good hunting a few miles inshore, etc.

The problems of navigation and seamanship need not worry you for the time being.

Perhaps you might tell me how to cook shark steak and some of the other secrets that are held in the heads of the old-time seaman.

In going through the Magellan Straits, which seems to be the best way, sailing westerly or to the east, in the months of November, December, January, which is Summer then?

Should you care to publish this please do not use name or address—but you can use the initials if you wish."—W. A. H.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—The people you mentioned as having gone around the world without expense had either luck or resources. Slocum in the *Spray* lectured at ports, picked up salvage and received many useful gifts of supplies. Stock in the *Dream* could earn money as a journalist when stuck for cash. You know what Drake is doing.

Bare food can always be had from passing ships, but the sea beggar is not popular. Nor do consuls care to provision a man as the regular thing.

Fish can almost always be got, and birds or game at places; but the only dependable stores for such a voyage are your canned and salt provisions. As an itinerary you can scarcely improve on Slocum's track unless you take the Panama Canal in preference to Magellan Straits. All along that track you may find places where you can get some kind of food for the hunting, or earn a little money by carrying parties in your boat, or selling photos taken on the trip.

During a great part of the trip you will get flying-fish without effort, which you fry like a herring. Bonita and mackerel you often get, and these are boiled in salt water. Shark is best cooked by running through a grinder with dry herbs and an onion if you have it, then frying like meat-balls.

Regarding passage through the Straits, east or west is equally bad for sailing-vessels. With power it is easy either way.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose full return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

A Winter Trapping Outfit

THIS outfit is designed especially for the Parry Sounds district of Canada, but doubtless would be found equally applicable for any cold, wooded country:

Question:—"Questions regarding trapping, etc., in Parry Sounds district. Here are particulars as fully as possible:

First I might say that the partner I have, served in France with me during the war, so we wouldn't want any luxuries. I would expect to have about $300, and wouldn't want to go to any more expense than was necessary.

I understand that the middle of September or not later than Oct. 1st would be the best time to go up. Well, supposing we say Oct. 1st till the trapping season for rats closes.

The shack wouldn't need to be any bigger than we could keep warm, as long as it held a stove, table and a couple of bunks. We intend going only this once, so far; but of course after the season we may figure on going again.

The number of traps we could take care of I don't know, because I don't know what kind of country it is and how many creeks are near us. We would take at least 50 to 75 traps anyway.

I do not know the nearest village; but my nearest neighbor is at Sand Lake Post-Office, two miles away.

I have enclosed a blue-print of Proudfoot Township, Parry Sounds, in which this property is situated.

What would be the most suitable clothing and boots to take, and the amount?

Are snowshoes necessary, or would they be excess baggage?

Now, no doubt I've overlooked a few questions that would help you in giving me this information; but supposing you were going with a partner you could depend on, and each of you had a limited amount of cash, and could find some humor in having to miss a meal, kidding yourself you had "dined" on a cigaret and toothpick and two notches of your belt, if it didn't happen any oftener than twice a week—what would you take and how would you go at it?"—Wm. Sapsworth, Doon, Ont., Can.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—Your nearest railroad station would be Ravensworth or Kearney Station or Katrine or Burke's Falls—some one of these. All are on the G. T. R.—east and north of Scotia Junction.

And the trapping through there should be good, unless it is already cluttered up with trappers. You will be only some fifteen or so miles from Algonquin National Park, and the fur-bearers in the park know no boundary lines. I don't know the details in there, but there is a post-office at Sand Lake, and therefore there should be a fairly good road within reasonable hiking distance of your land. There are quite a number of small lakes close to you, and lots of streams. In fact, I believe for the purpose you want it for those twenty-five acres lie in an ideal spot. And oh, boy! I'd like to get in there in the Summer with my fishing-tackle!

Now, putting myself in your place, going in there with a partner I could depend on and both of us willing to rough it, with a small capital:

First, I would get in there just as soon as I could in the late Summer, if I couldn't get away before—not later than Oct. 1st. I would build a cabin ten feet by twelve with two bunks, a table, one window and a stove-pipe hole.

I would use empty canned-goods boxes for chairs and buy an old second-hand stove at the last town or village nearest to my cabin where I could get it. I would buy my provisions from some of the big houses in Toronto and have them shipped to the nearest railroad station to get there about the day I was ready to take them to the shack.

Then when I had my cabin built and my stuff under its roof I would start in cutting wood for Winter fuel and stacking it up against the cabin, and searching out the runways of the fur-bearers and other likely spots to set my traps and mark out on the trees, and otherwise, the trail to the locations of my traps. I would get all that done before the snow came if possible. I'd buy a trapper's license too, I believe, and the special license for beaver.

I would take in with me a cross-cut saw, two good axes, brace and two bits (two-inch and ½-inch) five pounds nails (two-inch, three-inch and four-inch) one pair heavy strap-hinges for door, glass for the window (get the frame made outside), and two hundred feet—board measure—of cheap one-inch lumber for gable ends of cabin and door and incidentals, and a piece of heavy galvanized iron with a stove-pipe hole cut in the center of it for the roof (three feet by three feet square). I could get along with just that and the exercise of a little ingenuity.

I would take in three pairs of blankets for each man, and several large sheets of heavy brown paper—a sheet of heavy brown paper between blankets is worth more than another blanket to keep out the cold; and I'd fill my bunk-box with small conifer branches and lay one sheet of paper over them before I laid down a pair of blankets.

I would take all my old clothes with me, and if I had to buy I'd buy about six pairs of heavy wool socks and one pair of mackinaw socks, a pair of mackinaw trousers or heavy corduroys, a mackinaw jacket with a high collar and a real good cap, three suits of the best wool underwear and at least two flannel top shirts, and moccasins for the coldest of the weather and when you have to wear snowshoes (you'll need the snowshoes).

I'd take a good pair of heavy boots—high-laced are best; lots of tobacco and a pipe—cigarets aren't worth a cuss in the Winter in a shack or on a trap-line; an extra lens for my glasses if I wore glasses, and my shaving outfit and a pair of scissors, needle, thread, patches, etc.; fishing-tackle and firearms; writing-material and books, if I wanted to read; and one of those fifteen-dollar gramophones and a few records.

I'd take in lots of soap and matches and three or four towels (big, rough, Turkish bath towels) and my watch. I'd take in one two-gallon tea-kettle, one two-quart tea or coffee pot, a big dish-pan, two fry-pans (big) one three-gallon kettle and two one-gallon saucepans—all aluminum or heavy granite; tableware, also metal, and about one hundred feet of hay wire. Swing your grub-box by wire from the roof to keep out the mice. You will find lots of other uses, too, for the wire—for the stove-pipes, etc.

That is what I could get along nicely with. If I thought of a few other trifling things to make life more pleasant I would take them, too.

Then I would sit down and figure out my grub. If I was going in with a pal to live there from Oct. 1st till the rat season was over (about the last of March) I'd figure we would need a lot of food. You will have to figure that out for yourself—the amounts, I mean.

Figure this way: One pound of coffee will last one man two weeks if he likes it strong and takes it only for breakfast; a pound of tea, using it for two meals a day, will last one man ten to twelve days if he makes it fresh every meal; a pound of bacon will cut twenty slices, etc.

Also you will have to decide yourselves on the kind of food you will take in. The cheapest, lightest in weight, and usually the most nourishing foods are the dried foods. Beans, rice, tapioca, sago, prunes, apricots, dried apples, oat and corn meals, flour, etc.

Bacon is the easiest meat to handle, keeps as well as any, and is the most nourishing for its bulk; and fat salt pork comes second. Potatoes are the old standard vegetable, and you should be able to buy them near you there from some farmer or grower, but I would take in too, for a change, a case each of tomatoes, peas and corn. Also a case of some canned fruit for an occasional treat.

And don't be afraid to fish—fish are fine eating; and don't be afraid to eat off your trap-line. Muskrat and beaver are the finest of meat if you clean them right; and 'coon, one of the finest meats I ever tasted. Rabbits and partridge—well, you know they are good eating.

And don't forget the condiments—salt and pepper, and sugar, baking-powder, etc.

And here's a little tip. As soon as you are sure it is frozen up to stay frozen, ship in a lot of good white bread and freeze it up. Frozen bread, thawed out, is as fresh as the day it was made and will keep, if kept frozen, till Judgment Day. But you may have a small farmer near you somewhere where you can buy bread—and maybe butter, milk and other things. The rest of your food supply is up to you.

Seventy-five traps are not a great many, if you want to make money off your line. But they may be all you can take care of properly. I could, working hard, look after a hundred myself.

The point is, take as little in the way of equipment and tools as you can do with, and outfit with everything as cheaply as you can. Perhaps you have in your own homes an outfit of chipped and cracked table dishes, and odd old pans and pots that you could take and save buying. The use of your own ingenuity, and a little thought and serious consideration, will save you dollars.

Don't buy more food than you will absolutely need, for your trap-line and the streams and the running meat in the bush will save you a lot, or should; and you are not far from a village and can buy more if you need it.

And don't forget to take with you about four pounds of Epsom salts!

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in alternate issues of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Salt-Water Fishing Down South

HERE'S your outfit, or at least a good beginning toward it:

Question:—"Could you kindly tell me what kind of fishing-tackle it would be necessary to carry on a Southern yachting trip? I have bought a thirty-five foot auxiliary yawl and intend to spend a year or so, just cruising from New Jersey south to Mexican Gulf and around.

As it is all salt water, ordinary rods and reels wouldn't suffice. I am enclosing stamped and addressed envelop for reply."—Daniel A. Foley, Philadelphia.

"P. S.—I have only caught two fish in all my life. I am 31 yrs. old."

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—I would take along one salt or surf rod and a reel with at the least 150-yard line capacity. Be sure your lines are all Cuttyhunk or other good linen, for silk lines will rot quickly after contact with salt water. Take some squids and jigs along, and don't forget a few of the modern wooden minnows or plugs. They are fine, and almost all kinds of fish hit them.

For your tarpon fishing get some Vanvlecks special hand-forged O'Shaugnessy hooks with trace. A gaff is indispensable. Also have a rod rest.

You will find such a variety of fish, be sure and take a bunch of all-sized snelled hooks. Don't fool with a cheap rod or reel, for in salt-water fishing it will be put to the supreme test. Edw. K. Tryon in your city can fit you out well.

The Mexican Oil-Fields

LIMITLESS possibilities of development! If the figures given by Mr. Whiteaker are out of date by the time this appears in print, don't question his accuracy; blame it on the time elapsed since this was written, a delay for which we must of necessity be responsible:

Question:—"I desire some information as to the oil industry and general conditions in your section of Mexico so will ask a few questions relative to the subject, and if you will answer them I will be greatly obliged.

Please give me some general information about the natives of this section, their customs, language, etc. How important is the oil industry here? Is there much chance for development?

What is the general character of the land? By that I mean is it mountainous or level? Is the land bare or forested? What is the character of the climate?

What other industries are there besides the oil and lumbering industries?"—Kenneth Sley, Oxford, Neb.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—The southern part of Tamaulipas, Tampico-Panuco sections are about the richest oil-fields to be found. The natives are Mexicans, a mixture of Indian and Spanish, some pure Indians, half-breeds, Spaniards and many foreigners, Americans predominating. The chief languages spoken are Mexican and English.

The customs in this region are about the kind that you would look for in one of our larger cities where the foreign element is found. Each nation represented has a few peculiarities that are brought with them from that country.

The oil industry is one of the leading industries in Mexico. She produces more petroleum than any other country except the United States and Russia. There is a great chance for developing the oil industry.

The estimated area that is undermined with oil-pools is about 400,000 square miles, of which about 10,000 square miles have been explored and about 6,000 square miles are being prospected. There have been fewer than 1,000 wells drilled—400 of these are supplying the petroleum that is making Mexico one of the greatest petroleum countries.

The oil sections as a whole are low and rolling lands. There are some high hills in that region. The hill-slopes are timbered to some extent but not as much as it is farther north along the Gulf coast. The climate is rather warm in the Summer-time and is not as healthy as it could be. Sanitary conditions are being improved every year.

There are many ranches to be found back in the mountains and along the coast, fishing, farming, shipping, manufacturing in some of the larger towns and some mining. Tamaulipas occupies one of the most fertile and beautiful regions in the republic. The mineral wealth is practically undeveloped.

The coast is low, sandy and almost uninhabited. The forests are of valuable cabinet woods. Mineral springs are numerous. Plenty of game.

Nuevo Leon is the smallest northern State, more densely populated—richest and most progressive. Climate varies with altitude but is in general mild and healthy.

Mineral springs abound—many animals hunted. Cattle and fruit-growing are the chief industries.

Coahuila is the third largest State of Mexico. Fine climate—cattle-raising and mining are the chief industries. Large forests of valuable timber.

Chihuahua largest and Sonora second largest of Mexican States.

Rifle Lore

NOTHING like a specific question if you want a specific answer:

Question:—"1. Is the .280 caliber Ross rifle an American-made rifle?

2. If so where can same be obtained?

3. How does this rifle compare with the .30 cal. Newton rifle for a hunting arm?

4. Which rifle do you like best?

5. What weight bullet do you like best for the .280 cal., the 145 gr. or the 180 gr.?

6. Please tell me if the Newton Arms Corporation is still in operation or not.

7. Also please tell me how to find the energy in foot pounds of a bullet when the weight and velocity are known.

8. Which revolver would you prefer for a hunting trip, a .38 army special Colt or a .45 Colt new service?

9. I understand the Western Cartridge Company of East Alton, Ill., have perfected a non-fouling bullet. Kindly tell me what you think of this bullet?"—B. E. Coats, Batson, Ark.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—1. The Ross rifles were made in Canada till 1916, when the factory was appropriated by the Canadian Government for war purposes and was afterward junked, so no rifles have been made for sale since 1916, and the only way you can get one now is to buy a second-hand one. I consider them a poor buy, if you ask me.

2. You can usually get a second-hand one from W. M. R. Burkhard, 143 East 4th St., St. Paul, Minn.

3. I would far prefer the .30 Newton over the Ross. The Newton is American-made and is now being manufactured, and American ammunition is made for it now, this being good news to us shooters.

4. I would prefer the Newton rifle for the Springfield shell.

5. For target use in the .280 the 180 grains is best; for game use the 145 grain expanding bullet.

6. The Newton Arms Corp. is defunct for some time, but Chas. Newton is making and selling his rifles, his address being Chas. Newton Rifle Corp., 1083 Ellicot Square, Buffalo, N. Y.

7. To find the energy of a bullet, square the velocity of the bullet in foot-seconds and divide the result by 7,000 to reduce the pounds to grains weight; divide the quotient by twice the acceleration of gravity, or 64.32; multiply this by the weight of the bullet in grains, and you will have the energy of the bullet in foot-pounds. This is taken from the old Newton catalog.

8. I prefer the .45-caliber revolver for a side arm, but never carry one when hunting, as my rifle is sufficient. I usually carry a revolver when hiking or fishing, however.

9. The Western Cartridge Company's new Luballoy bullet absolutely does away with the old lumpy metal-fouling. I can recommend it to you. The national matches of 1922 were shot with this bullet, so you see it is considered good enough for the best shots in the country, in competition with all others submitted by various firms.

Rhodesia for Him

BUT if you don't care about trading, British East is still better:

Question:—"What part of Africa do you consider best from the standpoint of climate, living conditions, and sport (combined with trading) and what equipment is necessary?

Also would like such information as you can give on tribal customs and witchcraft."—Lynn Stevenson, Cape Charles, Va.

Answer, by Mr. Beadle:—Considering the four conditions named I should plump for the Rhodesias, either northwestern or northeastern. I may suggest that you will find now much competition by wealthy trading firms run by men who know the language—which is essential. For the first three—that is, cutting trading—British East is far and away the best; but don't forget that that is a rich white man's country, or at least requiring much capital for ranching and farming.

Get equipment on the spot—better and cheaper.

Obviously I can't attempt a general summary of tribal customs and witchcraft of Africa here; but I am sending you a small general tract on the subject; also I enclose a small bibliography.

The Cobalt Silver Camp

THE luck of Dan Larose:

Question:—"Could you tell me anything about the silver mines of Cobalt? It is about three hundred miles north of Toronto, in the heart of the Canadian Highlands. The district is about seventy miles long by forty miles wide.

Please tell me who first discovered it, and when, and under what circumstances? Is he still alive?

Can you tell me how much silver has been mined from there since it was first discovered?

How many mines are there in Cobalt now that are productive?

Would it be profitable now to go up there either to work at the mines, or for yourself? If I should work for myself, are there any places not already owned by private concerns that I could go to and make money?

How much would an outfit cost? When is the best time to go there?"—Earl Hartwell, Salem, Mass.

Answer, by Mr. Moore:—Cobalt has come into being and prominence within the past twenty years through the accidental discovery by a French-Canadian blacksmith—Dan Larose by name—of a rich vein of silver. It is said that Larose, who was sharpening tools and doing repair work for prospectors, hurled a hatchet at a fox. The hatchet missed the fox and tore up the ground. Larose picked up his hatchet, found the vein and afterward got fifty thousand dollars for it.

Now, I am just telling you this as I got it. Some say Larose was given some stock in the mine, which has been famous as the Larose Mine; but whether or not this is true I can't say. He left the Cobalt country for his old home in Quebec, and so far as I know is still living and enjoying life.

You have given me a stupendous task in asking me to give the total amount of silver taken out of the Cobalt country or the number of mines working there. I will tell you that Canada Year Book for 1920 gives the total production of silver for 1919 as 11,934,179 ounces, the greatest part of which came out of this world-renowned silver district. Some other years the production has been double that.

I don't know what to tell you about going up there on your own hook. Prospecting is not a good game for a man who has neither experience nor money to back him. If you could get in with some good company, or some good men, who would grubstake you and go fifty-fifty you might have a chance; but remember competition is keen, although as one mining engineer told me not very long ago, Ontario is not scratched for mineral. I am of the opinion myself that there are other Cobalts and Porcupines yet to be discovered in Ontario. The field is immense.

As you did not tell me whether or not you know anything about the game, I can not offer you any advice. As to whether you would get a job up there or not, I am not in touch. You might and again you might not. Why not drop a line to the managers of say the Timmins Mine, the Larose Mine—address it to the companies—and ask for a chance to make good in the mining game?

Drop me a line any old time and I will try to do what I can for you.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Wild Bill's Grave

Houlton, Me.

DEAR MR. FROTHINGHAM:

Noting some difference of opinion between the two old-time writers (Mr. Richardson and Mr. Maguire) quoted by Mr. Pendexter in Camp-Fire of April 20, 1922, as to whether or not "Wild Bill" (James B.) Hickok's was the first or second burial in Deadwood Cemetery, I would respectfully submit the following: In an old-time account of the killing of Hickok written at the time, or very shortly after, by a man who signed himself "J. W. B.", which seems to be a very accurate account of the assassination, giving names and data concerning the coroner's jury and inquest, the impromptu trial, names of jurymen, etc., a reference that might be applicable to the grave is this:

"After the inquest on the remains of Wild Bill the body was given in charge of 'Colorado Charley' Utter, and a litter was made by laying some boards across two poles, on which the body was placed and carried by a procession of friends across the creek to Utter's camp. . . . Here the final preparations for the funeral were made. . . . A grave was prepared close by Utter's cabin, in a most beautiful spot, at the foot of a large pine stump, which was utilized for a marker for the grave, and upon which was rudely carved the following:

"*A brave man, the victim of an assassin J. B. Hickok* (*Wild Bill*) *Aged* 48 *years murdered by Jack McCall Aug* 2, 1876."

A slight error was made in the epitaph in regard to his age; instead of being 48, he was 39 years 2 months and 6 days.

Owing to the growth of Deadwood in the latter seventies, Bill's friends decided to give their precious dead a more fitting resting-place, and on the third day of August, 1879, Charley Utter and Louis Shoenfield, accompanied by numerous other friends of the noble scout, removed the remains to Mount Moriah Cemetery, where a lot and grave had been prepared by Charley Utter, and there given a second burial. And as further evidence that Bill was not buried in the regular graveyard at the time of his death, we have the poem "Wild Bill's Grave" written by "Capt. Jack" (John W.) Crawford, the Poet Scout of the Black Hills, who ever delighted in embowering the memory of his dead comrade with the most fragrant of poetic garlands, in which he says in the second line of the first stanza, "At the foot of a pine stump there lies a *lone* grave"; and again in the last two lines of the second stanza he says, "And well I remember the day that he started that graveyard on top of the hill" (by shooting a horse thief). Now Capt. Jack wrote this poem in commemoration of the first anniversary of Hickok's tragic death for the *Virginia Evening Chronicle*, and I think it was published in the issue of Aug. 4th, 1877, of which the following is a true copy:

On the side of the hill between Whitewood and Deadwood,
At the foot of a pine stump, there lies a lone grave
Environed with rocks, and with pine-trees and redwood
Where the wild roses bloom o'er the breast of the brave.
A mantle of brushwood the greensward encloses;
The green boughs are waving far up overhead,
While under the sod and the flow'rets reposes
The brave and the dead.

Did I know him in life? Yes, as brother knows brother
I knew him and loved him; 'twas all I could give—
My love. But the fact is we loved one another,
And either would die that the other might live.
Rough in his ways? Yes, but kind and goodhearted:
There wasn't a flaw in the heart of Wild Bill,
And well I remember the day that he started
That graveyard on top of the hill.

A good scout? I reckon there wasn't his equal;
Both Frémont and Custer could vouch for that fact.
Quick as chain-lightning with rifle or pistol—
And Custer said, "Bill never backed!"
He called me his "kid"—Buffalo Bill was his "boy"—
And in fact he knew more than us both;
And, though we have shared in sorrow and joy—
Nary an oath!

And let me show you the good that was in him—
The letters he wrote to his Agnes—his wife.
Why, a look or a smile, one kind word could win him;
Hear part of this letter—the last of his life:

"AGNES DARLING: If such should be that we never meet again, while firing my last shot I will gently breathe the name of my wife—my Agnes—and with a kind wish even for my enemies, I will make the plunge and try to swim to the other shore."

O Charity! Come fling your mantle about him,
Judge him not harshly—he sleeps 'neath the sod.
Custer—brave Custer!—was lonely without him
Even with God.

Charge, comrades, charge! See young Custer ahead;
His charger leaps forth, almost flying.
One volley! And half his comrades are dead—
The other half fighting and dying.
Let us hope while their dust is reposing beneath
The dirge-singing pines in the mountains,
That Christ has crowned each with an evergreen wreath
And given them to drink from his fountains.—FRANKLIN W. HALL.

Compadre L. M. Harroll of Red Bluff Bay, Alaska, is on a still hunt for a pathetic bit of verse he heard in a New York music hall about ten years ago, entitled "The Murder of Blue-Eyed Ella in Lehigh Valley." Sing low, you musickers—I never heard it either in or out of a music hall.

Compadre John L. Parrish, 2225 Beale Ave., Altoona, Pa., would like to find a song, the title of which he has forgotten, about a railroad engineer who had to take his train out while his little daughter lay at the point of death. A line in the song runs thus—

"If the child is dead, just show the red; if she's better, show the green."

Susanna, Don't You Cry

I came from Alabama wid my banjo on my knee;
  I'm gwine to Louisiana my true love for to see.
It rained the day I left; the weather it was dry;
  The sun so hot I froze to death—

Chorus: Oh, Susanna, don't you cry for me,
    I've come back to Alabama
    Wid my banjo on my knee.

I jumped aboard de telegraph, an' trabeled down de riber.
  De 'lectric flud magnified, an' killed five hundred nigger.
The bulljine bust, the hose run off,
  I really thought I'd die.
I shut my eyes to hold my breath,
    Susanna, don't you cry. *Cho.*

I had a dream the other night,
  When every thing was still,
I thought I saw Susanna
  A-coming down the hill.
The buckwheat cake was in her mouth,
  A tear was in her eye,
Says I, coming from the south,
    Susanna, don't you cry. *Cho.*

I soon will be in New Orleans,
  An' den I'll look around;
An' when I finds Susanna
  I'll fall upon de ground,
But if I do not find her
  This darky'll surely die;
And when I'm dead an' buried,
    Susanna, don't you cry. *Cho.*

Comrade William L. Alden, 442 Madison Ave., Albany, N.Y., is looking for the "Marine's Hymn," which follows herewith, and for which I am indebted to comrade Captain Percy A. Hill of the Munoz Agricultural School, at Nueva Ecija, Philippine Islands:

United States Marine Song

From the halls of Montezuma
To the shores of Tripoli,
We fight our country's battles
On land and on the sea.
From the temples of the Dragon
To the sunny Philippines—
And though our lot is oft-times hard,
Who would not be a Marine?

From the pest hole of Cavité
To the ditch of Panama,
You will find them very needy
Of Marines—that's what we are.
We're watch dogs of a pile of coal
Or we dig a magazine—
Though he lends his hand at every job,
Who would not be a Marine?

Our flag's unfurled to every breeze
From dawn to setting sun.
We've fought in every clime or place
Where we could take a gun.
If the Army and the Navy
Ever look on Heaven's scenes—
They will find the streets are guarded
By the United States Marines.
(Author unknown.)

Compadre William F. Perkins, Murdock Building, Lafayette, Ind., would like to get the words and music of "Money Musk," if there are any words to that old darky dance song.—Robert Frothingham, 745 Riverside Drive, New York.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

DECEMBER 10TH ISSUE

THE LAST RUN — *Will MacMahon*
A dog that ran with the wolves.

A FOOL AND HIS FIDDLE — *John Joseph*
Music soothes; but bullets make sleep more lasting.

THE WRECK OF THE BRIG *COMMERCE* An Article — *R. N. Wall*
Slavery for men cast on the African coast.

MINERVA'S TREASURE — *Walton Hall Smith*
Pearls many fathoms down.

TAMELESS DAYS A Four-Part Story Part II — *Hugh Pendexter*
Beach Content kills his first man.

ROUGH JUSTICE — *F. St. Mars*
A caracal fights for her own.

A STONE IN THE POOL — *George E. Holt*
A strangled dancing-girl in Morocco causes an international incident.

AN UNPLEASANT EPISODE — *Clements Ripley*
Brute force against Chinese guile.

When the lifeless form stirred in the sudden darkness!

STEALTHILY he reached for the package that bulged from the pocket of the lifeless form on the bed. The candle flickered—then went out. In the dark he reached for the package—then suddenly sprang back with a choked cry. The dead man beneath his hand was stirring—and the pocket that had bulged with the package was empty!

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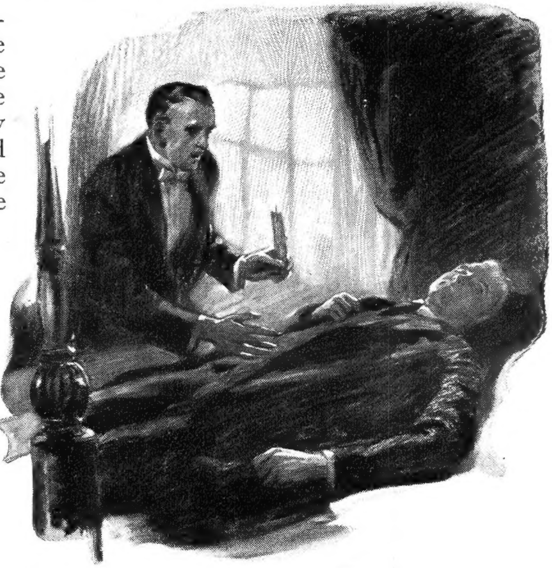

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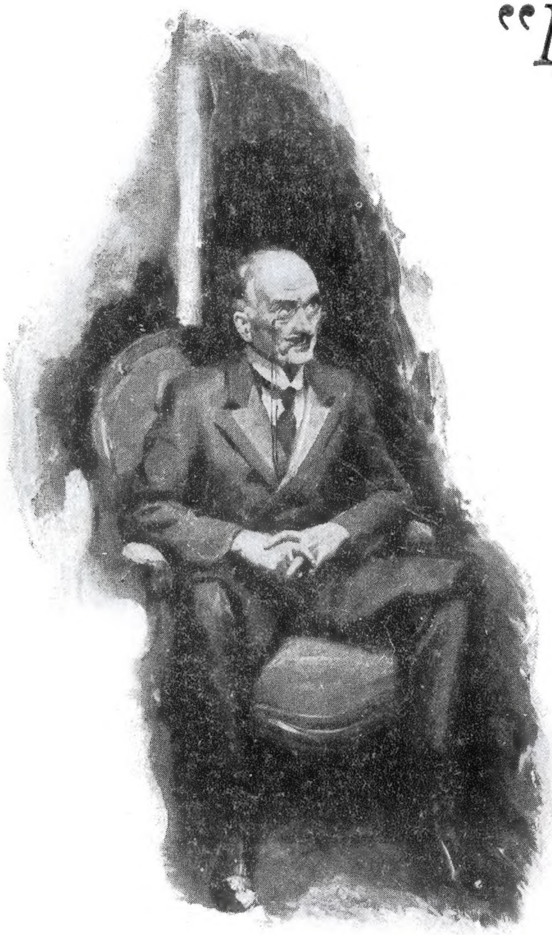

The police called it suicide . . . then this criminologist took up the case.

"When one kind of matter is superimposed upon another kind, the trace always remains"—said the strange little man with the cold gray eyes and the absurd pointed mustache of purplish black.

And by following this theory—investigating a smudge of blue chalk, the faint impressions of a woman's shoes on a rug, and even the blades of grass on which a body was found—he solved one of the greatest murder mysteries of Paris.

"The Pointed Tower" is the name of this serial story and it was written by Vance Thompson, the versatile author of "French Portraits," "Diplomatic Mysteries," "Eat and Grow Thin." It appears in *Everybody's Magazine* for November. Harold Titus, George Holt, James Oppenheim, George Kibbe Turner and Charles Hanson Towne also contribute to this issue. Get the

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